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## CONTENTS

### *Articles*

Richard KING, Is “Buddha-Nature” Buddhist? Doctrinal Tensions in the Śrīmālā Sūtra—an Early Tathāgatagarbha Text .....	1
Donald S. LOPEZ, Jr., Authority and Orality in the Mahāyāna .....	21
Richard E. DEMARIS, Demeter in Roman Corinth: Local Development in a Mediterranean Religion .....	105
Nathan KATZ, The Judaisms of Kaifeng and Cochín: Parallel and Divergent Styles of Religious Acculturation .....	118
David SCOTT, Buddhism and Islam: Past to Present Encounters and Interfaith Lessons .....	141
Peggy MORGAN, The Study of Religions and Interfaith Encounter .....	156
Mu-chou POO, The Images of Immortals and Eminent Monks: Religious Mentality in Early Medieval China (4-6 c. A.D.) .....	172
Robert H. SHARF, Buddhist Modernism and the Rhetoric of Meditative Experience .....	228

### *Survey article*

Antoine FAIVRE and Karen-Claire Voss, Western Esotericism and the Science of Religions .....	48
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### *Review articles*

Donald WIEBE, On Besson Saler’s <i>Conceptualising Religion: Immanent Anthropologists, Transcendent Natives, and Unbounded Categories</i> .....	78
Karel VAN DER TOORN, On Jean Bottéro’s <i>Mesopotamia: Writing, Reasoning, and the Gods</i> .....	83
R. J. Z. WERBLOWSKY, Recent Studies on Chinese Religions	197
Russell T. McCUTCHEON, The Category “Religion” in Recent Publications: A Critical Survey .....	284

*Book reviews*

Anandita N. Balslev and J. N. Mohanty (Eds.), <i>Religion and Time</i> (Shlomo BIDERMAN) .....	91
Paul Van Lindt, <i>The Names of Manichaeon Mythological Figures. A Comparative Study on Terminology in the Coptic Sources</i> (Wassilios KLEIN) .....	93
Susanne Krone, <i>Die altarabische Gottheit al-Lāt</i> (Han J. W. DRIJVERS) .....	94
Livia Kohn, <i>Early Chinese Mysticism: Philosophy and Soteriology in the Taoist Tradition</i> (Timothy LIGHT) .....	96
Armin W. Geertz, <i>The Invention of Prophecy: Continuity and Meaning in Hopi Indian Religion</i> (E. Thomas LAWSON) ....	99
Hoyt Cleveland Tillman, <i>Confucian Discourse and Chu Hsi's Ascendancy</i> (Timothy LIGHT) .....	204
Ulrike Peters, <i>Wie der biblischen Prophet Henoch zum Buddha wurde: Die jüdische Henochtradition als Beispiel interkultureller Vermittlung zwischen Ost und West</i> (R. J. Z. WERBLOWSKY) .....	206
S. A. Nigosian, <i>The Zoroastrian Faith. Tradition and Modern Research</i> (Manfred HUTTER) .....	207
Jacob Neusner, <i>Judaism and Zoroastrianism at the Dusk of Late Antiquity: How Two Ancient Faiths Wrote Down Their Great Traditions</i> (Michael STAUSBERG) .....	209
Michele Renee Salzman, <i>On Roman Time: The Codex-Calendar of 354 and the Rhythms of Urban Life in Late Antiquity</i> (Jörg RÜPKE) .....	210
Wolfgang Hardtwig and Harm-Hinrich Brandt (Eds.), <i>Deutschlands Weg in die Moderne. Politik, Gesellschaft und Kultur im 19. Jahrhundert</i> (Edith HANKE) .....	217
Terence Murphy and Gerald Stortz (Eds.), <i>Creed and Culture. The Place of English-Speaking Catholics in Canadian Society, 1750-1930</i> (Norbert M. BORENGÄSSER) .....	219
Shlomo Biderman and Ben-Ami Scharfstein (Eds.), <i>Interpretation in Religion</i> , and Shlomo Biderman and Ben-Ami Scharfstein (Eds.), <i>Myths and Fictions</i> (Ninian SMART) ....	310
Joachim Dalfen, e.a. (Eds.), <i>Religio Graeco-Romana. Festschrift für Walter Pötscher</i> (Jörg RÜPKE) .....	315
<i>Anthologie de Zādspram. Édition critique du texte pehlevi</i>	

traduit et commenté par Ph. Gignoux et A. Tafazzoli (Michael STAUSBERG) .....	317
Herbert Vorgrimler, <i>Geschichte der Hölle</i> , and Alan E. Bernstein, <i>The Formation of Hell. Death and Retribution in the Ancient and Early Christian Worlds</i> (P. W. VAN DER HORST) .....	319
Publications on Judaism (R. J. Z. WERBLOWSKY) .....	321
Jan Slavik, <i>Dance of Colours. Basic Patterns of Colour Symbolism in Mahāyāna Buddhism</i> (Adelheid HERRMANN-PFANDT) .....	323
F. L. Bakker, <i>The Struggle of the Hindu Balinese Intellectuals. Developments in Modern Hindu Thinking in Independent Indonesia</i> (Anette REIN) .....	325
Joseph M. Murphy, <i>Working the Spirit: Ceremonies of the African Diaspora</i> (Stephen D. GLAZIER) .....	326
Frans J. S. Wijzen, “ <i>There Is only One God</i> ”. <i>A Social-Scientific and Theological Study of Popular Religion and Evangelization in Sukumaland, Northwest Tanzania</i> , and Modeste Malu Nyimi, <i>Inversion culturelle et déplacement de la pratique chrétienne africaine</i> (Heinrich BALZ) .....	328
Medienprojekt Tübinger Religionswissenschaft (Ed.), <i>Der Islam in den Medien</i> (Marjo BUITELAAR) .....	329
<i>Publications received</i> .....	101, 221, 332
<i>In memoriam Ugo Bianchi</i> (Kurt Rudolph) .....	225

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# IS “BUDDHA-NATURE” BUDDHIST? DOCTRINAL TENSIONS IN THE ŚRĪMĀLĀ SŪTRA— AN EARLY TATHĀGATAGARBHA TEXT

RICHARD KING

## *Summary*

Recent controversies in Japanese Buddhist scholarship have focused upon the Mahāyāna notion of a “Buddha nature” within all sentient beings and whether or not the concept is compatible with traditional Buddhist teachings such as *anātman* (no-abiding-self). This controversy is not only relevant to Far Eastern Buddhism, for which the notion of a Buddha-nature is a central doctrinal theme, but also for the roots of this tradition in those Indian Mahāyāna *sūtras* which utilised the notion of *tathāgatagarbha* (Buddha-embryo or Buddha womb). One of the earliest Buddhist texts to discuss this notion is the *Queen Śrīmālā Sūtra* (*Śrīmālādevīsūtra*), which appears to display a transitional and revisionist attitude towards traditional Mahāyāna doctrines such as emptiness (*śūnyatā*) and no-abiding-self (*anātman*). These and related issues are examined as they occur in the *Śrīmālā Sūtra* and as they might relate to the issue of the place of Buddha-nature thought within the Buddhist tradition. Finally some concluding remarks are made about the quest for “true” Buddhism.

## *Introduction*

In a recent article in NUMEN Paul Swanson has outlined some of the contemporary academic issues surrounding the status of the Zen tradition within Buddhism as a whole.<sup>1</sup> Many of these issues focus upon the question of whether Zen and its understanding of “Buddha-nature” is in fact compatible with basic Buddhist ideas such as *anātman* (no-abiding-self). The roots of this controversy, of course, go much further back than even the Zen tradition itself and can be discerned (at least implicitly) in those Indian Mahāyāna texts which utilise the notion of a *tathāgatagarbha*.<sup>2</sup> The issue of the status of this teaching within the Buddhist tradition never really attained significant prominence in this relatively early period of the Mahāyāna’s history mainly because what might loosely be called the “*tathāgatagarbha*” strand of Indian Buddhism did not develop along scholastic lines, being, on the whole, assimilated by the developing Yogācāra system of thought. Despite this, there remains clear evidence of a tension in Indian Mahāyāna with regard to the

implications of the *tathāgatagarbha* idea for basic Buddhist teachings. In this paper I intend to examine such tensions in the light of the text known as the “*Lion’s Roar of Queen Śrīmālā*” (*Śrīmālādevīsīmhanādā-sūtra*), one of the earliest sources for the concept of “Buddha-nature” in Indian Mahāyāna.

As is well known, the term *tathāgatagarbha* has a double meaning. It can either denote the “Buddha-seed,” or “Buddha-embryo” or can be rendered as “Buddha-womb”. The term ‘*garbha*’ (from *grabh*: ‘to conceive’) originally seems to have denoted a ‘womb,’ but it soon came to refer to the interior of anything. The term was also used to denote a ‘foetus’ or ‘embryo’.<sup>3</sup> As such the compound ‘*tathāgatagarbha*’ has generally been translated as ‘embryo’, ‘seed’, ‘womb’, or ‘matrix’ of the Tathāgata.<sup>4</sup> Jikido Takasaki<sup>5</sup> favours the translation ‘matrix of the Tathāgata’, but has been criticised by Brian Brown<sup>6</sup> who finds the implications of a ‘container’ misleading, preferring those translations which emphasise the *tathāgatagarbha* as an embryonic seed. Note, however, that in one of the earliest texts to utilise the term, the *Śrīmālā Sūtra*, that the *tathāgatagarbha* is said to be not empty (*aśūnya*) in so far as “it contains inconceivable *Dharmas* more numerous than the sands of the Ganges.”<sup>7</sup> This suggests that the *tathāgatagarbha* could in fact be used to denote a container of pure *buddha-dharmas*. Earlier in the same text, however, we find the statement that the *dharmakāya* of the Tathāgata is “free from the shell of defilements” (*avinirmuktakleśakośa*). This is a clear indication that it was the defilements that were seen as impure “shells” (*kośa*) essentially separate from but containing the innumerable *buddha-dharmas*, which either constituted the *tathāgatagarbha* itself or were themselves ‘contained’ within it.<sup>8</sup> Generally speaking, however, it seems that the understanding of *tathāgatagarbha* as a “Buddha-womb” only really came to the fore in the East Asian Buddhist context. Nevertheless, the Indian texts do exploit the ambiguity of the term when it suits their purposes.

The *Śrīmālā Sūtra* remains one of the primary Indian sources for *tathāgatagarbha* thought.<sup>9</sup> Although dating the text is problematic, the *Śrīmālā* presupposes the doctrine of the two bodies of the Buddha (*rūpa-kāya* and *dharmakāya*), as found in the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā* and other early Prajñāpāramitā *sūtras*, and so, as Wayman suggests,

probably cannot be placed earlier than the second century CE. The text shows no awareness of the *Avatamsaka Sūtra*’s (c. 200-400) doctrine of the three bodies of the Buddha, and must pre-date (at least sections of) the *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra* which quotes the *Śrīmālā*. The first Chinese translation of the *Sūtra* (now lost) was carried out by Dharmakṣema in the early part of the fourth century CE. Wayman and Wayman draw attention to the text’s continual reference to the “good sons and daughters” of the congregation, implying patronage by men and women of high social rank. This leads them to “tentatively place the composition of the *Śrīmālā* within the Īkshvāku rule of the third century A.D.” They also suggest that the text may derive from the Mahāsaṅghikas of Southern India.<sup>10</sup>

The *Śrīmālā Sūtra* is in many respects a remarkable text, the most immediately striking feature being its dynamic conception of the *tathāgatagarbha*. It is the position of the *Śrīmālā* that the *tathāgatagarbha* is the base (*āśraya*, *niśraya*), support (*ādhāra*) and foundation (*pratiṣṭha*) of all constructed phenomena (*saṃskṛta*).<sup>11</sup> As such, it is unborn and undying, and excludes the “constructed realm” from itself. It is permanent (*anitya*), steadfast (*dharma*), and eternal (*śāsvata*) and yet is not to be mistaken for a personal self.

World-Honored One, the Tathāgata-embryo is not a self, a personal identity, a being, or a life. The Tathāgata-embryo is not in the domain of sentient beings who believe in a real self, whose thinking is confused, or who cling to the view of emptiness.<sup>12</sup>

The *Śrīmālā* clearly wishes to align itself with the traditional Buddhist emphasis upon no-abiding-self (*anātman*), however, the text also attributes qualities such as permanence and eternality to the *tathāgatagarbha*. Thus *Śrīmālā* continues that

If a sentient being, out of faith in the Tathāgata, regards the Tathāgata as permanent, joyous, pure, and possessing a self, he does not see [the Tathāgata] wrongly; he sees him correctly. Why? Because the Dharma-Body (*dharmakāya*) of the Tathāgata is the perfection (*pāramitā*) of permanence, the perfection of joy, the perfection of self, and the perfection of purity.<sup>13</sup>

How are we to reconcile this statement with the traditional Buddhist emphasis upon unsatisfactoriness (*duḥkha*), impermanence (*anitya*) and no-abiding-self (*anātman*), as the three marks of existence (*trilakṣaṇa*)? To attempt to answer this question it is necessary to consider the general orientation of the *Śrīmālā Sūtra* towards the Buddhist tradition as a whole.

*The Importance of Faith in the Śrīmālā Sūtra*

According to the *Śrīmālā*, the *tathāgatagarbha* is profound and subtle and in order to explain it the Buddha taught the four noble truths. This immediately establishes the concept of *tathāgatagarbha* as the central teaching of Buddhism. The profundity of the concept of 'Buddha-nature' (which I shall use as a rough synonym for '*tathāgatagarbha*' throughout this paper) entails that a correct understanding of the import of the noble truths and of the *tathāgatagarbha* is only possible for a fully enlightened being since both teachings are "beyond the scope (*viśaya*) of the 'disciples' (*śrāvakas*) and the 'solitary-buddhas' (*pratyekabuddhas*)," (i.e. the non-Mahāyāna Buddhists). Both the four noble truths and the *tathāgatagarbha* are "beyond the realm of thought and speculation, and transcend the credence of the world."<sup>14</sup> Thus the *Śrīmālā* maintains that "the *tathāgatagarbha* has never been seen or realized by any *Śrāvaka* or *Pratyekabuddha*."<sup>15</sup>

According to the *Śrīmālā*, all unenlightened followers of the Buddha must accept the existence of the *tathāgatagarbha* on faith (*śraddhā*) alone, true knowledge being reserved for the truly enlightened.<sup>16</sup> The exhortation to accept *tathāgatagarbha* doctrines on faith alone amounts to a rejection of the very possibility of 'proving' the *tathāgatagarbha* through logical arguments, (the *tathāgatagarbha* being "beyond logic").<sup>17</sup> This attitude alone may have been responsible for the fact that the *tathāgatagarbha* strand within Indian Mahāyāna never developed into a distinctive philosophical school of its own, nor drew much attention from scholastic texts which clearly post-date it.<sup>18</sup> Such a conception of the Mahāyāna path is itself an offshoot of the *Prajñāpāramitā* texts where one finds a constant subversion of the very possibility of philosophical speculation in anything other than a purely conventional and pragmatic sense. Nevertheless, the exclusive emphasis upon faith would have been unsatisfactory to the Abhidharma scholasts for whom philosophical exposition and the discrimination of *dharma*s (*dharma-pravicaya*) were the means for establishing wisdom (*prajñā*) and a fundamental prerequisite for the salvation of all beings. The Mahāyāna scholasts, whilst not accepting the efficacy of the Abhidharma taxonomy, nevertheless saw enlightenment in terms of a non-discursive insight

(*prajñā*) into the selflessness of those same *dharma*s. From this perspective, faith (*śraddhā*) is not enough, being only a preliminary stage on the path. The final goal was the ‘perfection of wisdom’ (*prajñāpāramitā*).<sup>19</sup>

### *The Śrīmālā’s Reformulation of the Four Noble Truths*

The perpetuation of *saṃsāra* is explained in the *Śrīmālā* in terms of a two-tier system of defilements. Firstly, we have the active defilements, which correspond to lust, hatred and confusion. These are momentary and arise in association with the conscious mind (i.e. we are consciously aware of them). Secondly, there is a more deeply entrenched layer of essentially static defilements which underlie the manifestation of the active defilements. This deeper level of defilement is classified into four sub-categories by the *Śrīmālā*, each corresponding to one of the fourfold division of grasping (*upādāna*), the ninth member of the *pratītyasamutpāda* scheme, as understood by the Abhidharma schools.<sup>20</sup> These four subdivisions are:

- (1) *dṛṣṭi-upādāna*: attachment to any of the sixty-two views outlined in the *Brahmajāla Sūtra*,
- (2) *kāma-upādāna*: attachment to pleasure (i.e., the five sense-objects),
- (3) *śīlavrata-upādāna*: attachment to useless vows and rules, (in the *Śrīmālā*, however, (3) has been substituted by *rūpa-upādāna*, attachment to form),
- (4) *ātmabhāva-upādāna*: attachment to existence.

Nevertheless, these four defilements are the underlying basis for the arising of the active defilements of lust, hatred and confusion. These active defilements are associated with consciousness to contrast them with the underlying static defilements which are clearly their unconscious, conditioning factors. In fact the *Śrīmālā* declares that all defilements (both active and static) are based upon an underlying defilement of ignorance, which “never arises in association with the conscious mind from beginningless time.”<sup>21</sup> Thus, ignorance is a latent factor in our experience and one of which we are not consciously aware. It is the fundamental defilement in that all other defilements are causally dependent upon it.<sup>22</sup>

The purpose of the *Śrīmālā*’s analysis is to point to ignorance as the underlying defilement which obscures the *dharmakāya* and

perpetuates our continued rebirth (*saṃsāra*). This is reminiscent of the earlier statement that the *tathāgata* is the support of *saṃsāra*. However, the question of the relationship between the *tathāgata* as the seed of future enlightenment, and ignorance as the seed of future *saṃsāric* activity is never properly addressed in the *Śrīmālā*. The important point to note is that the unenlightened *śrāvakas* and *pratyekabuddhas* only eliminate the four underlying roots of attachment (*upādāna*) and so are still under the sway of the underlying defilement of ignorance, which can only be eradicated by a *Tathāgata*.<sup>23</sup>

The inferior vehicles of the *śrāvaka* and the *pratyekabuddha*, by virtue of their status as such, can only attain a partial *nirvāṇa*.<sup>24</sup> This is because they are “directed toward the *nirvāṇa* realm”<sup>25</sup> since they continue to meditate upon suffering, its source, its cessation, and the means to that cessation, (i.e. the four noble truths), rather than realizing *nirvāṇa* itself. Here we seem to find evidence of a movement away from the traditional Buddhist emphasis upon *duḥkha*. In stark contrast,

Those who search all suffering, who eliminate all sources of suffering, who realize directly the cessation of suffering, and who cultivate all the paths leading to the cessation of suffering attain the permanent, calm and cooled Nirvana in the world destroyed by impermanence and ever sick, and become the protection and refuge of the world in a world without protection and without refuge.<sup>26</sup>

The *Śrīmālā* re-works the traditional scheme of the Four Noble Truths within a new framework which allows for two levels of understanding their import. These levels are described as the constructed (*kṛta*) and the unconstructed (*akṛta*) explanations of the Noble Truths. Aligned with this there are also said to be two levels of *saṃsāric* and *nirvāṇic* attainment: the constructed (*saṃskṛta*) *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa* and the unconstructed (*asaṃskṛta*) *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*.

According to this scheme, the *śrāvakas* and *pratyekabuddhas* aim for a refuge *nirvāṇa*, while the truly enlightened being needs no refuge since “the refuge [itself] does not seek a refuge.”<sup>27</sup> Of course, it becomes a central theme of the *Mahāyāna* that the bodhisattva does not reside in a quiescent *nirvāṇa* but in fact remains active within *saṃsāra*. Thus, one could say that the bodhisattva is in *saṃsāra* with-

out being a part of it. Perhaps the development of a theory of two types of bondage and liberation was inspired by attempts to differentiate between enlightened and unenlightened experiences of *samsāra* and *nirvāṇa*. Thus a fully enlightened being, rather than renouncing the world of suffering and entering a *nirvāṇa* of refuge, would remain active and unsupported in the *nirvāṇa* of no fixed abode (*apratiṣṭha nirvāṇa*). The *Mahāyānasamgrāha* describes such attainment in the following manner:

When one had produced the knowledge of the identity (*samatāññāna*) of *samsāra* and *nirvāṇa*, then, for this reason *samsāra* becomes *nirvāṇa*. Consequently, one neither abandons (*tyajati*) nor maintains *samsāra*, one neither obtains (*prāpt-noti*) nor fails [to obtain] *nirvāṇa*.<sup>28</sup>

The *Śrīmālā* is close to this position since it also declares that *nirvāṇa* is attained by those “whose knowledge is equal.”<sup>29</sup>

As we have seen, according to the *Śrīmālā* the scheme of the four noble truths was taught by the Buddha in order to explain the profound subtlety of the *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine. The constructed (*kṛta*) noble truths present the exoteric and superficial meaning of the scheme, being taught for the *śrāvakas* and *pratyekabuddhas* whose understanding is of a limited sense because of their dependence upon another.<sup>30</sup> In direct contrast to this, however, the unconstructed understanding of the noble truths is taught without any limitations since it does not presuppose the need for a refuge. This, maintains the *Śrīmālā*, is the only way to truly understand and eradicate suffering since it is not dependent upon another and is the true meaning of the noble truths scheme. In effect, the *Śrīmālā* expounds a theory of eight noble truths, four constructed and limited and four unconstructed and definitive.<sup>31</sup>

The *Śrīmālā* further declares that “cessation of suffering” (i.e. the third noble truth) does not in actual fact entail the destruction of anything since it is only a name for the *dharmakāya* of the Tathāgata. Thus it has

no beginning, no action, no origination, and no end; it is ever abiding, immovable, intrinsically pure and free from the shell (*kośa*) of defilements...when this Dharma-body (*dharmakāya*) is not apart from defilements, it is called the *tathāgatagarbha*.<sup>32</sup>

This is the closest the *Śrīmālā* comes to identifying the Tathāgata’s *dharmakāya* with the *tathāgatagarbha*. However, the

precise relationship between the two is never clearly specified in this text. As we have seen, the text denies that the *tathāgatagarbha* is a self and yet accepts the description of the *dharmakāya* as the ‘perfection of self’ (*ātmapāramitā*). The matter is left open for later works (namely the *Ratnagotravibhāgaśāstra* in particular) to discuss more fully. One should note however what appears to be a tacit acceptance of the validity of *ātman* terminology with regard to the *dharmakāya*. This in itself seems to herald a radical departure given the philosophical, historical and symbolical importance of the notion of no-abiding-self (*anātman*) within Indian Buddhism in general.

The *Śrīmālā* continues with the remarkable statement that, of the four noble truths, only the truth of cessation is true in the ultimate sense.

Lord, of those four noble truths, three truths are impermanent, and one truth is permanent. Why? The three truths [of suffering, the cause of suffering, and the path leading to the cessation of suffering] belong to the realm of conditioned *dharmas*. What is conditioned is impermanent, and what is impermanent is destructible. What is destructible is not true, not permanent, and not a refuge. Therefore, in the ultimate sense, the three noble truths are not true, not permanent, and not a refuge.

World-Honored One, the noble truth of the cessation of suffering is beyond the realm of conditioned *dharmas*. What is beyond the realm of conditioned *dharmas* is ever abiding by nature. What is ever abiding by nature is indestructible. What is indestructible is true, permanent, and a refuge. For this reason World-Honored One, the noble truth of the cessation of suffering is in the ultimate sense true, permanent, and a refuge.

World-Honored One, this noble truth of the cessation of suffering is inconceivable.<sup>33</sup>

Given that the *Śrīmālā* has already identified the ‘truth of cessation’ with the *dharmakāya*, this amounts to a declaration of the sole reality of the *dharmakāya* of the Tathāgata. All other factors (*dharmas*) are compounded (*saṃskṛta*) and thus, according to the *Śrīmālā*’s arguments, ultimately unreal. This is a remarkable declaration for a Buddhist text to make for it appears to fly in the face of all empirical attempts to classify and analyse the contents of experience, an endeavour carried out with some vigour by the Abhidharma schools and continued to a large extent by ‘mainstream’ Mahāyāna. The implication of the *Śrīmālā* analysis appears to be a denial of the reality of all constructed phenomena (*saṃskṛta dharma*), a position which clearly distinguishes it from both the Abhidharma and the Mahāyāna philosophical schools. The Sar-

vāstivāda Abhidharma, for instance, postulated the real existence of such *dharmas*, whilst in the Mahāyāna schools all *dharmas* are empty, not just *saṃskṛta dharmas*.<sup>34</sup>

Nevertheless, undeterred by the apparent philosophical consequences of this position, the *Śrīmālā* maintains that the *tathāgatagarbha* is the base (*āśraya*, *niśraya*), support (*ādhāra*) and foundation (*pratiṣṭha*) of all constructed natures (*saṃskṛta*), a substrative position reminiscent of the Vedānta schools.<sup>35</sup> This view is propounded despite the fact that on the *Śrīmālā*’s own premises the constructed elements (*saṃskṛta*) do not ultimately exist. Perhaps this explains the *Śrīmālā*’s assertion that the *tathāgatagarbha* is unborn and undying, and in fact excludes the “constructed realm” from itself. Nevertheless, one hardly need mention the similarity between this mode of expression and the absolutism of the Advaita Vedānta school. In both cases the subjacent ground (*tathāgatagarbha* :: Brahman) supports a constructed realm which in actual fact does not ultimately exist. Such a position, whilst more amenable to the Yogācāra system of thought (which postulates the *ālayavijñāna* as the base of experience),<sup>36</sup> does not fit easily with the “mainstream” Buddhist rejection of a subjacent ground of existence. Indeed, whether a substrative metaphysics can be maintained, given the unreality of that which is supported, is a moot point philosophically!

### *Doctrinal Innovation in the Śrīmālā Sūtra: The Reformulation of Mahāyāna Teachings*

The denial of the ultimate reality of the constructed when conjoined with an assertion of the ultimate reality of the unconstructed (*asaṃskṛta*, i.e. the *dharmakāya*) is a clear movement away from the Madhyamaka doctrine of emptiness (*śūnyatā-vāda*), which points to the lack of an abiding-self of all *dharmas* (*dharma-nairātmya*). That the *Śrīmālā* does not understand emptiness and no-abiding-self in the same manner as the Madhyamaka can be gleaned from the following qualification:

Lord, the *tathāgatagarbha* is void of all the defilement stores, which are discrete and knowing as not liberated [or ‘apart from knowledge that does not lead to liberation’].<sup>37</sup> Lord, the *tathāgatagarbha* is not void of the *Buddhadharmas* which are nondiscrete, inconceivable, more numerous than the sands of the Ganges, and knowing as liberated.<sup>38</sup>

Emptiness is understood here in a more characteristically Yogācāran sense as the emptiness of one thing within another (i.e. of the form 'x is empty of y' rather than in the Madhyamaka sense of 'x is empty of x-ness'). Thus the *tathāgatagarbha*, as support or substratum for the manifestation of *saṃskṛta dharmas*, is devoid of them. Of course this must necessarily be the case if the *tathāgatagarbha* is real and the *saṃskṛta dharmas* are not. Nevertheless, one must still resist the temptation of ascribing self-hood to the *tathāgatagarbha*, argues the text, for this is an extreme view as are the views of "those who cling to the view of emptiness."<sup>39</sup>

Lord, this *tathāgatagarbha* is the embryo [Chang: 'store'] of the Illustrious *Dharmadhātu*, the embryo of the *dharmakāya*, the embryo of supramundane *dharma*, the embryo of the intrinsic pure *dharma*.<sup>40</sup>

The *tathāgatagarbha* seems to be a dynamic and developmental reality in the *Śrīmālā* and thus cannot constitute a persisting or personal self. It is intrinsically pure (being the embryo of the *dharmakāya*), but is nevertheless contaminated by adventitious defilements (*āgantuka kleśa*). For this reason it is described as the base, support and foundation of enlightenment wisdom and of the constructed *dharmas* of the saṃsāric world. Presumably the adventitious defilements correspond to a large extent to the constructed *dharmas*, which are manifested with the *tathāgatagarbha* as their basis (*āśraya*) and yet remain separate from and extrinsic (*āgantuka*) to it. As such these defilements are ultimately unreal and so cannot contaminate the intrinsically pure mind. The *Śrīmālā*, however, seems unaware of this way out of the problem and defends innate purity on the basis of the argument it elucidated earlier in the text *viz.* that the mind, as a momentary and fluctuating continuum, cannot be contaminated by defilements since it does not persist for long enough to come into contact with them. According to the *Śrīmālā*, the momentary mind cannot 'hold' experiences and so the *tathāgatagarbha* is needed to account for the aversion to suffering and the aspiration to liberation.

### *Textual Ambiguities and Doctrinal Ambivalence in the Śrīmālā Sūtra*

Philosophical ambiguities and ambivalence towards certain traditional Buddhist doctrines and practices reflect the transitional

nature of the *Śrīmālā* and the fact that the author of the *Sūtra* seems unaware or perhaps unwilling to draw certain philosophical consequences from the text’s basic position. Notably, there is no development of the *Śrīmālā*’s notion that what is constructed (*saṃskṛta*) does not really exist. Perhaps this stems from the possibility that the initial impetus behind the *tathāgatagarbha* strand within Indian Mahāyāna may have been a dissatisfaction with the Madhyamaka explanation of the truth of suffering in terms of the universality of emptiness. If everything lacks inherent existence what then is the status of the first noble truth? This is a question posed and then dismissed by Nāgārjuna in chapter 24 of his *Mūla-Madhyamaka-kārikā*, yet the question seems to have remained amongst those Mahāyānists who remained unhappy about the apparently nihilistic implications of *śūnyata* as understood by the Mādhyamikas. In the *Śrīmālā* we can discern an attempt to qualify the universality of emptiness. However, as we have seen, this qualification still seems to amount to a denial of the reality of the constructed. This too might easily be taken to lead to the unfortunate conclusion that suffering is not a reality.

What the *Śrīmālā* encounters here is what might be called the ‘problem of soteriology’. Theodicy is any attempt to account for the existence of evil and suffering in a world created by a benevolent god. Conversely the ‘problem of soteriology’ is one of accounting for the need for liberation given that there is in fact no real suffering. This problem develops because of the *Śrīmālā*’s insistence that the factors of the constructed realm (specifically the first, second and fourth noble truths) do not ultimately exist because they are impermanent (*anitya*) and lacking in self (*anātman*).

Guṇabhadra’s recension of the text (Taishō 353, p. 222) declares that the view that “all constructions are impermanent”<sup>41</sup> is the extreme view of nihilism while the view that *nirvāṇa* is permanent is the extreme of eternalism. This appears to contradict the position stated earlier in the *Śrīmālā* that ‘what is constructed is impermanent, and what is impermanent is illusory’ and the conclusions drawn from that position, namely that the truths of suffering, the cause of suffering, and the path leading to its cessation are in fact themselves impermanent and illusory.<sup>42</sup>

Three possibilities remain. Firstly, Guṇabhadra or some earlier

redactor may simply have misunderstood the section involved or edited it so as to conform to a certain doctrinal position. That this is likely is shown by the fact that other translations of the text into Chinese differ as to the precise nature of the two extreme views. Thus, according to Chang's translation, based not upon Guṇabhadra's edition but on Bodhiruci's, the text states that:

World-Honored One, if one sees *samsāra* as impermanent and *nirvāṇa* as permanent, his view is neither nihilistic nor eternalistic, but is the right view.<sup>43</sup>

However, Chang notes that "Guṇabhadra's version seems deeper in meaning".<sup>44</sup> This may be so, but it also appears to be more incomprehensible when related to the general position of the text.

Secondly, the problem may reflect the fact that the author(s) of the *Śrīmālā* were unaware of the apparent contradictions within the text, or that she or he<sup>45</sup> was unwilling to draw certain conclusions about the unreality of suffering and *samsāric* existence from its basic premises. This would explain the denigration of what appear to be the text's own position as an extreme view, perhaps in an attempt to deflect criticism deriving from Buddhist scholasts. One could also argue that the inconsistency is intended to be a paradox based upon the idea that the *tathāgatagarbha* is unthinkable and beyond logic (*atarka*).<sup>46</sup> This interpretation would fit in with the *Śrīmālā*'s basic emphasis upon the layperson and the importance of faith rather than the philosophical exercise of scholastic precision. In fact the *Śrīmālā Sūtra* concludes with the Buddha praising the lay Queen Śrīmālā and declaring that:

Śrīmālā, there are two things difficult to understand. What are the two? First, the intrinsically pure mind; second, the contamination of this mind with defilements. Only you and those Bodhisattvas who have already accomplished the great *Dharma* can accept these two things upon hearing of them. The *śrāvakas* can understand them only through faith.<sup>47</sup>

Finally, it may be the case that the author of the *Śrīmālā* is far more philosophically subtle than we have been giving her(?) credit for, and that she is aware of the discrepancy between the declaration of the impermanence of the constructed and the subsequent denial of this view as extreme. If such is the case, the original intention behind the establishment of an unconstructed *samsāra* and a constructed *nirvāṇa* may have been to allow for the existence of an (unconstructed) *samsāra*, having denied the reality of the con-

structed. Perhaps this was felt to be the only way that the text could maintain the reality of suffering, given its denial of all but the third noble truth as final. Thus, whereas the construction, of the constructed *samsāra* are impermanent, the statement that the constructions of the UNCONSTRUCTED *samsāra* are impermanent would be an extreme view. Likewise, whereas the unconstructed *nirvāna* is permanent, it would be wrong to state that the constructed *nirvāna* were equally so. However, it is by no means clear that this circumvents the problem and the omission of the constructed-unconstructed qualification of these extreme views makes the position appear incomprehensible in its present form.

However we attempt to reconstruct the original intention of the author the establishment of an unconstructed *samsāra* and a constructed *nirvāna* flies in the face of the accepted Buddhist scholastic tradition, inherited from the Abhidharma, for which *samsāra* is the realm of impermanent and constructed *dharma*s (*samskrta dharma*s, with the exception, in the case of the Vaibhāṣikas, of *ākāśa* which is *asamskrta*) and *nirvāna* is a permanent and unconstructed *dharma* (an *asamskrta dharma*, and in the case of the Theravāda, the only *asamskrta dharma*).

As we have seen, the *Śrīmālā* left certain fundamental questions about the nature of the *tathāgatagarbha* largely unanswered. The text is unsure as to how one is to reconcile the notion of an intrinsically pure mind with the existence of defilements. The text is also unable to deal with the problem of the relationship between the *tathāgatagarbha*’s twin functions as the store of the pure *buddha-dharma*s on the one hand and as the support of the constructed world on the other; nor is its relationship with ignorance ever clarified, both being described as the source of the world’s manifestation.

Such problems were new philosophical obstacles for the Indian Mahāyānists to deal with and highlight the fundamental paradigm shift that was occurring within certain Mahāyāna circles. For the Madhyamaka and classical Yogācāra schools the question of the relationship between the mind and the factors which defiled it was something of a pseudo-problem since both consciousness (*viññāna*) and defilement (*kleśa*) were fundamentally empty and so ultimately without basis. The problem arose, however, with the acceptance of the notion of the *tathāgatagarbha* and its association with the notion

of a luminous (and intrinsically undefiled) mind. Since the *Śrīmālā* does not seem to have accepted either the mainstream Madhyamaka conception of universal emptiness nor the Yogācāra position that the mind (*citta*) and its concomitant factors (*caittas*) were basically one and the same phenomenon (i.e., just-mind, *citta-mātra*), the problem of the relationship between an undefiled mind and its apparent defilement remains to be resolved.

For the author of the *Śrīmālā* the reality of an intrinsically pure mind was a basic presupposition, grounded as it was in a firm belief in the possibility of salvation and a religious orientation toward the spiritual catharsis of (apparently) defiled consciousness. As such the major philosophical concern of the text is the attempt to delineate the relationship between an ultimate reality (viz, the intrinsically pure mind or *dharmakāya*) and a conventional reality (the constructed factors or *saṃskṛta dharmas* and the adventitious defilements or *āgantuka kleśa*).

What is surprising, however, is that the *Śrīmālā* does not fall back upon the two truth schemes to reduce the question of the relationship between the pure mind and its defilements to that of a pseudo-problem. The *Śrīmālā* could have argued that the two can never be truly related, being ‘existent’ in fundamentally different senses. Perhaps this reflects the fact that the *Śrīmālā* is a relatively early *tathāgatagarbha* text and as such is either unaware or unwilling to come to terms with some of the trickier philosophical aspects of its basic position (or perhaps it reflects the possibility that the *Śrīmālā* did not wholeheartedly endorse the notion of an ‘intrinsically pure mind’ in quite the manner that we have been suggesting.)

### *The Transitional Nature of Mahāyāna Doctrines in the Śrīmālā Sūtra*

The emphasis upon the *tathāgatagarbha* as an embryonic and “processive” factor, (not to be mistaken for a personal self despite its permanent and indestructible nature,) when combined with the text’s recourse to the doctrine of the momentariness of consciousness, suggests that the *Śrīmālā* was unwilling to move in the direction of a fully blown absolutism based upon the sole reality of the *dharmakāya*. This can be contrasted with the more straightforwardly revisionist use of the term *ātman* to refer to the

*tathāgatagarbha* in the *Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra*. Paul Williams for instance has suggested that,

The *Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra* teaches a really existing, permanent element (Tibetan: *yang dag kham*s) in sentient beings. It is this element which enables sentient beings to become Buddhas. It is beyond egoistic self-grasping—indeed the very opposite of self-grasping—but it otherwise fulfils several of the requirements of a Self in the Indian tradition. Whether this is called the Real, True Transcendental Self or not is immaterial, but what is historically interesting is that this *sūtra* in particular (although joined by some other *Tathāgatagarbha sūtras*) is prepared to use the word ‘Self’ (*ātman*) for this element. However one looks at it the *Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra* is quite self-consciously modifying or criticising the no-Self traditions of Buddhism.<sup>48</sup>

The *Śrīmālā Sūtra*, however, appears to be more of a transitional text than the *Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra*, displaying many of the features which were to become more explicit in later Buddhist works. Notable, however, is a shift in perspective away from the universality of emptiness as expounded in the *Madhyamaka* and classical *Yogācāra* schools. This transitional position, however, leaves certain doctrinal aspects of the text unresolved. The *Śrīmālā* suggests that the impermanent is illusory but then declares that the mind is momentary and thus cannot be touched by defilements. Are we to take it that the *tathāgatagarbha* is something other than the intrinsically pure mind? If not how is the *tathāgatagarbha* to remain the support (*āśraya*), the holder (*ādhāra*) and the foundation (*pratiṣṭha*) of a world that it does not come into contact with?

### *The Place of the Buddha-Nature Doctrine in Buddhism*

In the debate concerning the meaning of the concept of Buddha-nature and its consequent status within the Buddhist tradition as a whole, emphasis has been placed upon the apparent postulation of a permanent and abiding essence (*svabhāva*) within sentient beings. As Paul Swanson shows in his recent article in *NUMEN* (40: 115-149), this and related notions, in particular the Japanese notion that all beings are “inherently enlightened” (*Hongaku shisō*), have been criticised by a number of Japanese scholars as “un-Buddhist” in that they appear to contradict basic Buddhist teachings such as the universality of emptiness (*śūnyatā*), and the doctrines of no-abiding-self (*anātman*) and impermanence (*anitya*). As we have seen, doctrinal ambivalence with regard to the concept of ‘Buddha-

nature' can be discerned in the earlier Indian Mahāyāna traditions. Within the Tibetan Mahāyāna context there is a comparable dispute surrounding the status of *gzhan stong pa* (other-emptiness), a doctrine upheld by the Jo nañ pas, which has a number of similarities to, and is to some degree dependent upon, the *Śrīmālā* conception of emptiness.<sup>49</sup> Certainly the *Śrīmālā* displays a number of views which seem to reflect a major paradigm shift within early Indian Mahāyāna. The implications of this shift for Eastern Buddhism are enormous since the *tathāgatagarbha* and related notions became increasingly important notions once Mahāyāna migrated beyond its original Indian context.

To conclude, a number of related questions continue to puzzle me about the entire debate about the allegedly "un-Buddhist" status of the 'Buddha-nature' concept and other apparently 'new' teachings within Buddhism. What criteria are we to use in defining the doctrinal parameters of a religious tradition? If the criterion is what the Buddha taught then this presents enormous problems in reconstructing so-called "original" Buddhism. This no doubt would end up with the exclusion of much of what goes by the name of Buddhism in all traditions. One suspects that much of this debate is labouring under the *aegis* of what Paul Williams has aptly called the "essentialist fallacy," that is the false belief that for a term like "Buddhism" to be meaningfully used one must be able to discern some central feature, some universally accepted kernel of doctrine or practice which unites all Buddhist traditions together.<sup>50</sup> As we have seen, even if one restricts "true Buddhism" to those doctrines present in its original Indian context (a parochial tendency occasionally present in the work of scholars of Indian Buddhism and beyond!), one still finds texts like the *Śrīmālā Sūtra* and the *Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra*, which use "un-Buddhist" terms like *ātman* to refer to the Buddha-potential in all sentient-beings. Where do we draw the line of demarcation which distinguishes the "Buddhist" from the "un-Buddhist"? Should we expect the diversity of followers of a multifarious tradition such as Buddhism to expound a univocal position with regard to the nature of their religion?

"Buddhism," I suggest, is a polythetic concept, which, in Wittgensteinian terms, denotes "a complicated network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing."<sup>51</sup> Thus, attempts to

define some essential core or central feature to ‘Buddhism’ will inevitably result in narrowness and exclusion. Nevertheless, this does not prevent the scholar from describing the various Buddhist movements, beliefs and practices, even if a fixed definition of the subject-matter is, strictly speaking, impossible. Indeed, if one is prepared to admit it, it would not be surprising to find that the majority of the world’s Buddhists do not understand, let alone uphold, ‘cardinal’ Buddhist beliefs such as the philosophical doctrines of no-abiding-self (*anātman*) and dependent-co-origination (*pratītyasamutpāda*).

In essence (if you pardon the pun), I suppose my position is this. We may have some, albeit fragmentary, idea about the nature of Buddhist doctrine in its origins, but do we have any right, insofar as we are speaking as scholars of Buddhism, to limit the scope of doctrinal innovation within a religion on the grounds that it cannot be easily reconciled with what has gone before? Where is the locus of ‘true Buddhism’? Does it make sense to talk of ‘true’ Buddhism? Is it even ‘unBuddhist’ to talk in terms of a Buddhist orthodoxy?<sup>52</sup> And finally, to quote the concluding question of Richard Gombrich’s *Precept and Practice*, “*vox populi vox Buddhae?*”<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Paul L. Swanson (1993), “Zen is not Buddhism: Recent Japanese Critiques of Buddha-Nature” in *NUMEN* 40: 115-149.

<sup>2</sup> Many interesting issues related to this notion in Indian and Eastern Buddhism are discussed in Paul Griffiths and John P. Keenan (ed.), (1990), *Buddha Nature: A Festschrift in Honor of Minoru Kiyota* (Buddhist Books International, Tokyo, Japan).

<sup>3</sup> See Monier-Williams (1988), *Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, (Clarendon Press, Oxford), p. 349.

<sup>4</sup> For the various connotations of the term ‘*tathāgatagarbha*’ see Ruegg (1969), *La Theorie du tathāgatagarbha et du Gotra*, (Paris), pp. 499-513.

<sup>5</sup> See Takasaki (1966), *A Study of the Ratnagotravibhāga*.

<sup>6</sup> Brian Edward Brown (1991), *The Buddha Nature: A Study of the ‘Tathāgatagarbha’ and ‘Ālayavijñāna’*, (Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi), pp. 44-45.

<sup>7</sup> Translation in Chang (1983) (ed.), *A Treasury of Mahāyāna Sūtras: Selections from the Mahārātnakūṭa-Sūtra* (Pennsylvania State University Press), p. 378; cf. Wayman and Wayman, *The Lion’s Roar of Queen Śrīmālā*, p. 99.

<sup>8</sup> Clearly there is some confusion as to the precise meaning of the statement that the *tathāgatagarbha* is not empty of the *buddha-dharmas*. On the one hand this may mean that the *tathāgatagarbha* is in fact identical to these *buddha-dharmas*, or alternatively it may mean that the *tathāgatagarbha* is 'not empty' in the sense that it contains those same *buddha-dharmas* within itself. The problem perhaps reflects the desire of the authors of these texts to utilise aspects of both the 'container' and the 'contained' notions of *tathāgatagarbha* (and their appropriate analogies), coupled with an awareness that the *tathāgatagarbha* is essentially beyond the limits of logic and rational discourse.

<sup>9</sup> Translation in Chang (1983), p. 378; cf. Wayman and Wayman, *The Lion's Roar of Queen Śrīmālā*, p. 99.

<sup>10</sup> See Wayman and Wayman, *ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>11</sup> Chang (1983), p. 380, and Wayman and Wayman, *ibid.*, pp. 104-105.

<sup>12</sup> C. Chang (1983), p. 380, cf. Wayman and Wayman, p. 106.

<sup>13</sup> Trans. Chang (1983), p. 379; cf. Wayman and Wayman, p. 102.

<sup>14</sup> Chang (1983), p. 377; Wayman and Wayman, p. 96.

<sup>15</sup> Chang (1983), p. 379, cf. Wayman, p. 99.

<sup>16</sup> The appeal to faith is a great leveller since it effectively places the monastic scholar and the layperson in the same fundamental position of *not knowing* the truth. Thus we find a stress upon the importance of the "good sons and daughters of the true *Dharma*", many of whom, no doubt, were lay practitioners and an emphasis upon the unity of the Buddhist community via the doctrine of the one vehicle (*ekayāna*). The *śrāvakayāna* and the *pratyekabuddhayāna* are included within the Mahāyāna, which is said to be the 'Vehicle of the Buddha' (*buddhayāna*). "This being the case the three vehicles are one." (Chang [1983], p. 375, cf. Wayman and Wayman, p. 92.)

<sup>17</sup> This conclusion, drawing as it does from the Prajñāpāramitā attack upon logical categories, is somewhat reminiscent of Tertullian's argument that Christianity must be believed precisely because it is so unbelievable.

<sup>18</sup> The idea that all Buddhists cannot know the truth (not being Buddhas) and therefore should have faith in the authority of the Buddha's words reduces the scholastic exercise to little more than scriptural exegesis. While it is true to say that Buddhist philosophers generally considered themselves to be disciples of the Buddha(s) rather than philosophical innovators, it is clear that this attitude is not consonant with the development of a philosophical system or school because it excludes the very possibility of involvement in a logical or theoretical debate.

<sup>19</sup> David Seyfort Ruegg seems to suggest that the *tathāgatagarbha* texts also accept faith as a preliminary. See chapter one of David Seyfort Ruegg (1989), *Buddha-nature, Mind and the Problem of Gradualism in a Comparative Perspective: On the Transmission and Reception of Buddhism in India and Tibet*.

<sup>20</sup> See *Abhidharmakośa* chapter III.

<sup>21</sup> See Wayman and Wayman, *ibid.*, p. 84.

<sup>22</sup> At this point the *Śrīmālā* refers explicitly to the dependent-origination scheme, having already implicitly referred to it in its references to the four subdivisions of 'grasping' (*upādāna*), the ninth member of the scheme. Thus dependent upon the arising of ignorance the defilements of attachment occur and depending upon these attachments further ignorance arises, thus perpetuating the cycle.

<sup>23</sup> See Chang (1983), p. 373 and Wayman and Wayman, p. 85.

<sup>24</sup> The form of liberation attained by the *ārahats* and *pratyekabuddhas* is "nirvāṇa with a remainder" (i.e. the cessation of impurities (*kleśa*), while the five *skandhas*

remain). This is described as the “supreme *nirvāṇa* stage of the arrested breath” and, according to Wayman, is a reference to the attainment of the fourth *dhyaṇa* by the *āraṇ* and the *pratyekabudha* (Wayman and Wayman, p. 91). That they attain this stage of quiescence is due to the inclusion of the *śrāvaka* and *pratyekabudha* ‘vehicles’ in the One-Great-Vehicle, the *eka-mahā-yāna*.

<sup>25</sup> Translation by Wayman and Wayman, p. 86.

<sup>26</sup> Translation by Wayman and Wayman, p. 86-87.

<sup>27</sup> Wayman and Wayman, *ibid.*, p. 80.

<sup>28</sup> *Mahāyāna-saṃgraha* IX.3.

<sup>29</sup> Wayman and Wayman, p. 87.

<sup>30</sup> The inferiority of the constructed meaning of the four noble truths is due to the fact that “when one depends on another person, one does not seek out all suffering, eliminate all sources of suffering, directly realize the cessation of all suffering, cultivate all the path leading to the cessation.” (Translation by Wayman and Wayman, p. 97.)

<sup>31</sup> Only the Tathāgata can understand the unconstructed noble truths since “*nirvāṇa* is not to be realized by any *dharma*, whether superior or inferior, whether, low, middle or high.” (Translation in Chang (1983), p. 378; cf. Wayman and Wayman, p. 97.)

<sup>32</sup> Chang (1983), p. 378; cf. Wayman and Wayman, p. 98.

<sup>33</sup> Trans. Chang (1983), *ibid.*, p. 378-379; cf. Wayman and Wayman, p. 100.

<sup>34</sup> See for instance, Nāgārjuna’s *Madhyamaka-Kārikā* 7.33.

<sup>35</sup> See Chang (1983), p. 380, and Wayman and Wayman, *ibid.*, p. 104-105. For a full discussion of the *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine and parallels with the Advaita Vedānta position see R. King, *Early Advaita Vedānta and Buddhism: The Mahāyāna Context of the Gauḍapādīya-Kārikā*, (SUNY Press) forthcoming.

<sup>36</sup> The *Śrīmālā* argues that if there were no *tathāgatagarbha* there could be no aversion to suffering and no corresponding aspiration for liberation from it. The reason for this is that the six sense-consciousnesses (that is the five sense-consciousnesses plus the *mano-vijñāna*) and the seventh mental consciousness (*kliṣṭa manas*?) are momentary and so cannot retain the experience of suffering. Thus, the necessity of positing the *tathāgatagarbha* as the beginningless and endless ‘repository’ of experiences. This explanation of the *raison d’être* of the *tathāgatagarbha* places the notion in a similar explanatory position to that held by the *ālayavijñāna* in the Yogācāra school. However, the emphasis here is upon the *tathāgatagarbha* as a store or collection of pure *buddha-dharmas*, whereas in the Yogācāra, *ālayavijñāna* stores both pure and impure seeds and is essentially phenomenal. In later texts, for example the *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra*, the syncretism of *tathāgatagarbha* and Yogācāra ideas is carried out by means of just such a conflation of terms.

<sup>37</sup> Chang (1983), p. 378.

<sup>38</sup> Wayman and Wayman, p. 99.

<sup>39</sup> Chang (1983), *ibid.*, p. 380.

<sup>40</sup> Translation by Wayman and Wayman, p. 106; cf. Chang (1983), *ibid.*, p. 380.

<sup>41</sup> Translation by Wayman and Wayman, p. 101.

<sup>42</sup> Chang (1983), p. 378-379; Wayman and Wayman, p. 100.

<sup>43</sup> Translation Chang (1983), p. 379.

<sup>44</sup> See Chang (1983), *ibid.*, footnote (26) on p. 385.

<sup>45</sup> The ‘feminist’ aspects of the *Śrīmālā Sūtra* suggests the possibility of a female author.

<sup>46</sup> Wayman and Wayman, p. 96.

<sup>47</sup> Translation by Chang, p. 381; cf. Wayman and Wayman, p. 106-7.

<sup>48</sup> Paul Williams (1989), *Mahāyāna Buddhism: The Doctrinal Foundations* (Routledge), p. 99.

<sup>49</sup> The most recent work to discuss this issue is S. K. Hookham (1991), *The Buddha Within: Tathāgatarbha Doctrine According to the Shengtong Interpretation of the Ratnagotravibhāga* (SUNY Press).

<sup>50</sup> Williams, *ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>51</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein (1976), *Philosophical Investigations* (English translation by G. E. M. Anscombe, Oxford, Basil Blackwell), paragraph 66.

<sup>52</sup> Admittedly, this is an odd question to ask. To argue that it is “unBuddhist” to have a category of “unBuddhist” appears paradoxical, and some might argue that it is downright contradictory, since it excludes the possibility of exclusion, yet there is a substantive point behind such a question, namely, is it appropriate to place the burden of Buddhist identity on the construction of an orthodoxy? Given the Asian context of Buddhism, would orthopraxy not serve us better?

<sup>53</sup> Richard Gombrich (1971), *Precept and Practice* (Clarendon Press, Oxford), p. 327.

# AUTHORITY AND ORALITY IN THE MAHĀYĀNA

DONALD S. LOPEZ, JR.

## *Summary*

The Mahāyāna sūtras, acknowledged by scholars to have been composed centuries after the death of the Buddha, almost invariably begin with the stock phrase, “thus did I hear,” thereby maintaining the conceit of orality. The paper explores the role of this orality as it figures in strategies of authority for the Mahāyāna sūtras in Indian Buddhism. The paper considers at some length recent scholarship (notably that of Richard Gombrich) on the question of when Buddhist texts were first written down, in light of the widely read but highly problematic theories of orality put forth by Walter Ong and Jack Goody. The paper next compares the positions on speech (and by extension, orality) in the Mīmāṃsaka view of the Vedas and in the Buddhist view of the word of the Buddha. Although Buddhist scholastics devoted a great deal of energy to attacking the Mīmāṃsaka position of the eternal nature of the Vedas as sound and although scholars have tended to regard the Hindu and Buddhist positions as antithetical, there are significant unacknowledged affinities between the Mīmāṃsaka and Buddhist positions which help explain why the Mahāyāna sūtras begin, “thus did I hear.” The paper concludes with a discussion of the possible significance of writing in the rise of the diverse association of cults of the book which we have come to call the Mahāyāna.

By being transmitted via so many spokesmen, the Saddharma ran the greatest of dangers. From the beginning, it should have been enclosed in a code of authentic writings, recognised by all the members of the Community unanimously; however, the Buddhists only belatedly perceived the necessity of a codification of the Dharma; moreover, the oral transmission of the Doctrine rendered such a task, if not impossible, at least very difficult.

Étienne Lamotte

It may seem surprising that as late as the eleventh century, Indian commentators still felt compelled to discuss the referent of the “I” of “thus did I hear” (*evaṃ mayā śrutam*) at the beginning of Mahāyāna sūtras. Perhaps they were simply performing their roles as commentators in explaining the meaning of every word. Still, one might expect that by that date there would at least have been some agreement among them. But a survey of seven Pāla dynasty commentaries on the *Heart Sūtra*, for example, (the most commented upon of Indian Mahāyāna sūtras based upon what is preserved in the Tibetan canon) displays a wide range of opinion

on the issue. Some of the commentators make a remark only in passing as they gloss the terms of the sūtra, but others dwell on the question of the qualifications of the rapporteur (*saṃgītīkarta*) and on what it means to have heard (*śruta*).

What is at stake in the identification of the rapporteur? To claim that the rapporteur is Vajrapāṇi or Mañjuśrī or Samantabhadra, or to say it is Ānanda, or to leave the rapporteur unnamed is to add another voice to one of the most persistent choruses in Indian Mahāyāna literature, the defense of the Mahāyāna sūtras as the word of the Buddha. We find “proofs” of the authenticity of the Mahāyāna in the works of major and minor śāstra authors, as early as Nāgārjuna in the second century<sup>1</sup> in his *Ratnāvalī* and as late as Abhayākara-gupta in the twelfth century in probably the last major Buddhist śāstra composed in India, the *Muṇimatālaṃkāra*. In the intervening millennium, we find Asaṅga, in the *Bodhisattvabhūmi*, listing the repudiation of the *bodhisattvapiṭaka* as one of four major transgressions (*pārājayika*) of the bodhisattva vow;<sup>2</sup> in the *Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra* we find much of the first chapter devoted to the proof that the Mahāyāna is the word of the Buddha;<sup>3</sup> and in the *Tarkajvāla*, Bhāvaviveka devotes a large portion of the fourth chapter to a defense of the Mahāyāna, but only after listing the charges brought against it by the śrāvakas: the Mahāyāna sūtras were not included in either the original or subsequent compilations of the *tripiṭaka*; by teaching that the Tathāgata is permanent, the Mahāyāna contradicts the dictum that all conditioned phenomena are impermanent; because the Mahāyāna teaches that the *tathāgatagarbha* is all pervasive, it does not relinquish the belief in self; because the Mahāyāna teaches that the Buddha did not pass into nirvāṇa, it suggests that nirvāṇa is not the final state of peace; the Mahāyāna contains prophecies that the great śrāvakas will become buddhas; the Mahāyāna belittles the arhats; the Mahāyāna praises bodhisattvas above the Buddha; the Mahāyāna perverts the entire teaching by claiming that Śākyamuni was an emanation; the statement in the Mahāyāna sūtras that the Buddha was constantly in meditative absorption (*saṃāhita*) is infeasible; by teaching that great sins can be completely absolved, the Mahāyāna teaches that actions have no effects, contradicting the law of karma. Therefore, they conclude, “the Buddha did not set forth the Mahāyāna; it was

created by beings who were certainly demonic in order to deceive the obtuse and mislead those with evil minds.”<sup>4</sup>

Thus, to address the question of who heard the *Heart Sūtra* is to seek to rebut these charges, and each answer implies a different point. To say that the rapporteur is Mañjuśrī or Vajrapāṇi is to imply that the Mahāyāna sūtras are secret teachings not intended for śrāvakas and thus purposefully delivered in their absence; Ānanda is not the rapporteur because he was not there to hear the sūtras. To say that the rapporteur was Ānanda is to attempt incorporation, that just as the Nikāyas were heard and reported by Śākyamuni’s attendant, so also were the Mahāyāna sūtras. And to say that the rapporteur was Ānanda, but that he was empowered by the Buddha to perform the task and that, even then, he merely heard but did not understand what he would later report, is to attempt to have it both ways, preserving the Mahāyāna as the most profound of teachings, beyond the ken of śrāvakas, but still to be counted among the discourses heard in the physical presence of Śākyamuni. Finally, to leave the rapporteur unnamed is to allow sūtras to be heard by anyone with the qualifications of faith, for as the *Samādhirāja* says, “When the Buddha, the *dharmarāja*, the proclaimer of all doctrines, the *muni* appears, the refrain that phenomena do not exist arises from the grass, bushes, trees, plants, stones, and mountains.”<sup>5</sup>

### *Strategies of Legitimation*

In pursuing the question of the authenticity of the Mahāyāna further, we may move away from the texts for the moment, to consider recent theories of the origins of the Mahāyāna, by positing two admittedly rather amorphous periods of Indian Mahāyāna, the period of the sūtras and the period of the śāstras. The first, following the work of scholars like Schopen and Rawlinson, would be placed around the beginning of the Common Era, with the rise of a disparate collection of cults centered around newly composed texts and their charismatic expositors, the *dharmabhāṇaka*. Some of these texts, like the *Lotus*, in addition to proclaiming their own unique potency as the means to salvation, would also promote the veneration of stūpas. Others, like much of the early *prajñāpāramitā*

corpus, would proclaim their superiority to stūpas, declaring themselves to be substitutes for the body and speech of the Buddha, equally worthy of veneration and equally efficacious in result.

The commentaries on the *Heart Sūtra* fall into the latter phase of Indian Mahāyāna, the period of the śāstras, that period in which there seems to have been, rather than a relatively disconnected collection of cults of the book, a self-conscious scholastic entity that thought of itself as the Mahāyāna and which devoted a good deal of energy to surveying what was by then a rather large corpus of such books and then attempting, through a variety of hermeneutical machinations, to craft the myriad doctrines contained there into a system. In short, it is in this latter period that the sūtras, which seem at first to have been recited and worshipped, became the object also of scholastic reflection.

There are obvious problems with such a typology. For example, we have one of the key scholastic defenders of the Mahāyāna, Nāgārjuna, writing in its defense during the period of the composition of the sūtras. Indeed, he sought to provide a schematic overview of Mahāyāna practice by compiling a compendium of quotations from sixty-eight Mahāyāna sūtras, the *Sūtrasamuccaya*. That a single author had that many works available to him in the second century indicates the literary energies of their anonymous authors. And the period of the śāstras is no less ambiguous, with sūtras being composed in this period which attempt to deal with apparent contradictions among the Mahāyāna sūtras, the most famous case being the *Samdhinirmocana*. Indeed, one of the sūtras that Nāgārjuna cites in his *Sūtrasamuccaya*, the *Laṅkāvatāra*, in an apparently interpolated passage, contains a retrospective prophecy of Nāgārjuna's birth, hailing him as a defender of the Mahāyāna.<sup>6</sup>

But it would be a mistake to suppose that the apparent unsystematic milieu of the period of the sūtras implies that the authors of those sūtras were unaware or unconcerned with the question of the legitimation of their compositions. In the *Aṣṭasāhasrikāprajñāpāramitā*, for example, there are repeated warnings to regard as demonic those who would dispute that the perfection of wisdom is the word of the Buddha. The *Lotus* takes up the more difficult question of why, if the *bodhisattvayāna* is indeed the most sublime path and buddhahood the highest goal, did the Bud-

dha teach the *śrāvakayāna* leading to the nirvāṇa of the arhat? The claim to primacy of the earlier tradition is usurped by the Mahāyāna by explaining that what the Buddha had taught before was in fact a lie, that there is no such thing as the path of the arhat, no such thing as nirvāṇa. There is only the Mahāyāna, which the Buddha intentionally misrepresents out of his compassionate understanding that there are many among his disciples who are incapable of assimilating so far-reaching a vision.

It remained, however, for the *Lotus* to account for those disciples of the Buddha who are reported in the Nikāyas to have become arhats, to have passed into nirvāṇa. What of their attainment? In an ingenious device found also in other Mahāyāna sūtras, the great heroes of the Hīnayāna are drafted into the Mahāyāna by the Buddha's prophecies that even they will surpass the trifling goal of nirvāṇa and go on to follow the Mahāyāna path to eventual buddhahood. The first such prophecy in the *Lotus* is for the wisest of the early disciples, Śāriputra. Afterwards, hundreds of arhats tacitly denounce their own path by rather indecorously clamoring for prophecies that they also will become buddhas someday, requests that the Buddha happily obliges. The Mahāyāna sūtras thus respond to challenges to their own authenticity by appropriation. Śāriputra, the monk renowned in the Hīnayāna as the wisest of the Buddha's disciples is transformed into a stock character in the Mahāyāna sūtras, one who is oblivious to the higher teaching. When his ignorance is revealed to him, he desires to learn more, coming to denounce as parochial the wisdom that he had once deemed supreme. Thus, the champion of the Hīnayāna is shown to reject it and embrace that which many adherents of the earlier tradition judged to be spurious.

The early history of the dharma, already highly mythologized into a sacred history, was fictionalized further in the Mahāyāna sūtras, creating eventually another sacred history; to legitimate these newly appearing texts, their authors claimed the principal figures of the earlier collection, indeed its very codifiers (Śāriputra, Maudgalyāyana, Kāśyapa, Subhūti) as converts to the Buddha's true (but previously unrevealed) teaching and as central characters in its drama.<sup>7</sup> In doing so they added the theme of reconciliation which we associate with comedy to the standard romantic emplot-

ment of the Buddhist path narrative. What we have, then, is a case of revisionist myth presented as revisionist history. The early story of Gautama Buddha and his disciples that we find preserved in the Pāli suttas, already accepted as an historical account by the “pre-Mahāyāna” traditions, is radically rewritten in the *Lotus* in such a way as to glorify the *Lotus* itself as the record of what really happened. Such rewriting recurs throughout the history of the Buddhist tradition in the perpetual attempt to recount “what the Buddha taught.” At the same time, this rewriting in a certain sense displaces what was for the Mahāyāna a problematic question, the question of origins, by introducing a different frame of reference in which tales lead back not to events, but to other tales.<sup>8</sup>

It would be a mistake, however, to assume that the development of strategies of legitimation in Indian Buddhism coincided with the rise of the Mahāyāna. Criteria to be employed in determining what should be counted as *buddhavacana* seem to have been developed well before the appearance of the Mahāyāna sūtras. Even the earliest formulations do not suggest that the dharma is limited to what was spoken by the Buddha. The Mahāsaṃghikas and Mūlasarvāstivādins counted both what the Buddha himself said as well as discourses delivered by a disciple of the Buddha and certified by him as being true. In the Pāli Vinaya, the dharma is what is proclaimed by the Buddha, by śrāvakas, by sages (*ṛṣi*) such as Āraka, and by gods such as Indra. To this list of four, the Sarvāstivādin Vinaya adds the category of spontaneously born beings (*upapāduka*).<sup>9</sup> A second set of criteria considered not the speaker but what was said. These are the four *mahāpadeśa*, much discussed by others,<sup>10</sup> which appear as early as the *Dīghanikāya* (II.123) and as late as Prajñākaramati’s commentary on the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* (commenting on IX.42). Tests are provided for determining whether the words that a monk reports to have heard from one of four authorities are the teaching of the Buddha: the words (1) of the Buddha, (2) of a community (*saṃgha*) of elders, (3) of a smaller group of learned elders, and (4) of a single learned monk. When someone claims to have heard a teaching directly from one of these four sources, the saṃgha may determine whether it is the word of the Buddha by seeing whether it fits into the sūtras (*sutte oranti*) and is in agreement with the vinaya (*vinaye sandissanti*). If it does, it is

to be accepted, if it does not, it is to be rejected. The Sanskrit versions, both Hīnayāna (in the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*<sup>11</sup>) and Mahāyāna add a third criterion to conformity with the sūtras and with the vinaya: that the words not go against the way things are (*dharmatām na vilomayati*).<sup>12</sup> It is unclear precisely what is added by this third criterion, since it would appear inappropriate for a doctrine to be in accordance with the sūtras and the vinaya, yet contradict the *dharmatā*. As a strategy for determining textual authority the *mahāpadeśa* is highly conservative, effectively sanctioning only those doctrines and practices which are already accepted. It appears to be the product of a community simultaneously lamenting the loss of teachings already forgotten and hence seeking to discover and preserve whatever still remained, while at the same time remaining wary of the introduction of innovation. If such criteria were actually enforced, it is difficult to imagine how a sect apparently as deviant as the Vātsīputriya ever established itself. But even a considerable laxity in criteria would seem insufficient to account for whatever sparked the explosion of texts that would become the Mahāyāna sūtras.

Before considering that question, however, let us briefly survey the criteria for textual authenticity developed by the Mahāyāna. The long argument in the *Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra* has already been delineated in a recent article by Ronald Davidson.<sup>13</sup> Here, we will mention only what is sometimes read as a licentious Mahāyāna rhetorical twist on the innocuous statement in Aśoka's rock edict at Bhairāt, "All that the bhagavan Buddha has spoken is well spoken" (*E kechi bhaṃte bhagavatā budhena bhāsite sarve se subhāṣita*).<sup>14</sup> The twist is the statement from the *Adhyāśayaśāṅcodanasūtra*, "All which is well-spoken, Maitreya, is spoken by the Buddha" (*yat kiṃcinmaitreya subhāṣitam sarvaṃ tadbuddhabhāṣitam*).<sup>15</sup> This chiasmatic reversal would seem to remove all restrictions from admission into *buddhavacana*; but the sūtra, not unexpectedly, qualifies the meaning of *subhāṣita*, of what it means to be well-spoken. All inspired speech should be known to be the word of the Buddha if it is meaningful and not meaningless, if it is principled and not unprincipled, if it brings about the extinction and not the increase of the afflictions, and if it sets forth the qualities and benefits of nirvāṇa and not the qualities and benefits of saṃsāra.<sup>16</sup>

There is ostensibly nothing new or controversial here<sup>17</sup> when compared to the *mahāpadeśa*. There are, however, two significant shifts in emphasis. First, unlike the four *mahāpadeśa*, we find in the four criteria above no concern whatsoever with the source of the doctrine; it need not be heard directly from a *saṃgha* or a learned monk. Second, again unlike the four *mahāpadeśa*, the words are not judged to be the word of the Buddha based on their conformity with already accepted statements but based instead on their function: to destroy the afflictions and lead to nirvāṇa, certainly the most traditional of Buddhist aims, but in the absence of an omniscient arbiter, the Buddha, impossible to judge. Mahāyāna exegetes are eager to point out that the mere fact that the Hīnayāna schools dispute the authenticity of the Mahāyāna sūtras signifies nothing since the eighteen śrāvaka sects cannot even agree among themselves as to which discourses should be accepted as the word of the Buddha. They then shift to the question of the function of the sūtras, claiming that it is the Mahāyāna sūtras that more effectively set forth the path to buddhahood for all beings, a goal, of course, that is set forth only in the Mahāyāna sūtras.<sup>18</sup> But if there is no Buddha and everything is permitted, why do the commentators continue to cogitate over the identity of the rapporteur? The attempt to address that question requires us to return first to the deferred question: what took place that sparked the explosion of texts that would become the Mahāyāna sūtras?

### *The Question of Orality*

In a recent article,<sup>19</sup> Richard Gombrich has speculated that the rise of the Mahāyāna is due to the use of writing. The *Lotus Sūtra* recommends enshrining books in stūpas, as one would a relic, and Gregory Schopen has postulated the presence of a “cult of the book” in the early Mahāyāna, noting the common references in the *prajñāpāramitā* corpus to the merit to be accrued through copying, reciting, and venerating the book.<sup>20</sup> To claim that the rise of the Mahāyāna can be attributed to the new technology of writing is, of course, to also claim that prior to this moment in Buddhist history, the Nikāyas were preserved orally, and the bulk of Gombrich’s article is devoted to showing that this was indeed the case.

The first reference to the *tipiṭaka* and its commentary being committed to writing occurs in the *Dīpavaṃsa* in which it is stated that during the reign of Vaṭṭagāmanī Abhaya (29-17 B.C.E.) the monks who remembered the canon wrote it down, so that it might long endure.<sup>21</sup> In arguing against the existence of a written recension of the Nikāyas prior to this date, Gombrich (expanding on an argument made in an article by Lance Cousins<sup>22</sup>) speculates that the Buddha's words were crafted into oral texts designed with the aim of mnemonic preservation, employing techniques such as redundancy, versification, and the arrangement of works according to length, all methods known to the monks from the Vedas. The saṃgha was organized toward the task of preservation, with the four Nikāyas representing four traditions of memorization; we find reference, for example, to the Dīghabhāṇakas and the Majjhimbhāṇakas. In addition to the "oral" quality of the Pāli suttas, Gombrich notes that the few references to writing in the Vinaya are to writing as a means of message sending and public notification (such as the wanted poster described in Vinaya I.43) but never as a means of preserving the suttas. Gombrich concludes, following Oldenberg and Rhys Davids, that had the inscription of the suttas been an activity of the saṃgha, there would have been some mention of it in the Vinaya.<sup>23</sup>

Two lines of argument, not unrelated to each other, require scrutiny here. One is the claim that the Buddhist canon meets the criteria set for what has come to be called "oral literature" and second, that the Buddhist oral canon was modeled on the Vedas. Gombrich's argument for the oral quality of the Pāli suttas develops a position put forth by Lance Cousins. Cousins, based on his reading of Albert Lord's analysis of tape-recorded performances by Serbian epic singers,<sup>24</sup> argues that the Pāli Nikāyas and Abhidhamma are oral literature. Upon comparing recorded versions, Lord found considerable variation among songs, even those performed by the same singer. Thus Cousins accounts for variations (such as in names of speakers and locales) that occur among the various versions of the Nikāyas by arguing that the discourses of the Buddha were preserved solely in the monks' memories, to be recited publicly for edification and entertainment. He finds further support for his view in the presence of mnemonic formulae and in

the fact that the same episode will often appear in separate texts within the Pāli collection.

That Buddhist monks recited sūtras is not at issue, the question instead is whether the sūtras are the end products of an oral society. A great deal of scholarship has appeared on oral cultures since the work of Milman Parry on the Homeric epics during the 1920's and even since the publication of Lord's work in 1960, much of it usefully summarized by Walter Ong in his 1982 work, *Orality and Literacy*.<sup>25</sup>

Ong provides a laundry list of nine characteristics of oral culture. (1) The works of oral cultures are additive rather than subordinate in that they are marked by pragmatics, such as simple grammatical constructions linked by identical conjunctions, whereas written structures place greater emphasis on the organization of the discourse itself without concern for the needs of the speaker, employing subordinate clauses rather than conjunctions. (2) The works of oral societies tend to be aggregative rather than analytic, employing a variety of mnemonic aids such as epithets, formulae, and stock phrases, often lacking the sense of individual words as discrete units. (3) Such works are highly redundant, repeating what has been said in order to allow the often distracted listener to follow the narrative.

From these more or less formal observations about orality, Ong next moves to characterizations of oral societies, noting that (4) they are conservative or traditionalist, in that they inhibit intellectual experimentation and speculation. (5) They conceptualize knowledge, in his phrase, "close to the human lifeworld," in that they lack elaborate analytic categories that would structure knowledge apart from lived experience. And in a statement that should set off an alarm in the brain of any student of Buddhism, he declares that, "An oral culture has no vehicle so neutral as a list."<sup>26</sup> It is instead literate cultures that devise lists, outside the context of human action. (6) The works of oral cultures are agonistically toned, marked by exaggerated vituperation and extravagant praise and descriptions of what otherwise might be termed graphic violence, thereby situating knowledge within a context of struggle. Writing, on the other hand, "fosters abstractions that disengage knowledge from the arena where human beings

struggle with one another.”<sup>27</sup> The remaining characteristics are so many variations on what is by now a familiar theme. (7) Orality is empathetic and participatory, bringing about a close communal identification with the known. (8) It is homeostatic in that it remains concerned with the present, allowing memories of what has been irrelevant to fade from communal consciousness. (9) Finally, it is situational rather than abstract, unavoidably using concepts but again within situational frames of reference which are “minimally abstract.” For this last point he draws on the research of the famous Soviet neurologist A. R. Luria among Russian peasants in the 1930’s, noting that illiterates lack articulate self-analysis because it requires “a demolition of situational thinking.”<sup>28</sup> For Ong, then, oral cultures are fixed and formulaic, while writing frees the mind for original and abstract thought, a fact (if it indeed be a fact), that Ong seems to report with a certain nostalgic regret.

In his discussion of what he calls the psychodynamics of orality, Ong makes inevitable mention of the claims to orality concerning the Vedas. However, his comments are made in passing and amount to the cautious observation that the traditional assertions that works of such length were orally composed and retained verbatim over many centuries in an oral society and thus by purely oral means cannot be taken at face value, asking such questions as whether what was retained was the original composition by the author or some later and revised version.<sup>29</sup>

A more sustained analysis of the claim to Vedic orality has been made by the anthropologist Jack Goody, who devotes a chapter to the issue in his 1987 work, *The Interface Between the Written and the Oral*.<sup>30</sup> He argues that the Vedas are not the product of an oral society based on the discrepancies he discerns between the Vedas and the verified products of oral societies. For example, unlike other cases of oral recitation, such as the Serbian epics studied by Lord, in which the work is maintained by illiterate or semi-literate singers, we find in India the responsibility for the oral tradition confined to a literate caste of specialists. Investigators have also found little evidence of long poems among oral cultures; hence the extreme length of the Vedic corpus also weighs against its orality. The claims to invariant transmission are also reason for suspicion

when compared to the considerable variation noted between tape-recorded performances of a single work among oral societies where it is not a poem that is transmitted, but rather its substance and technique.<sup>31</sup> S. Dow has gone so far as to declare, “Verbatim oral transmission of a poem composed orally and not written down is unknown.”<sup>32</sup> Instead, Goody sees the Veda as a written tradition passed down, for the most part, by oral means. The brahman’s storied verbatim recall serves as evidence of the existence of writing because a fixed text can be copied and consulted for correction in ways that an oral text cannot. The graphic device of the table used to organize the Sanskrit alphabet, the highly abstract formulae found in Pāṇini, and even the *kramapāṭha* (ab, bc, cd), the *jaṭāpāṭha* (ab, ba, ab, bc, ab, bc, cb, bd, cd) and *ghanpāṭha* (ab, ba, abc, cba, abc) texts described by Staal in *Nambudiri Veda Recitation* all point, says Goody, to a level of schematization and abstraction impossible without writing; the Vedas are what he calls parallel products of a literate society.<sup>33</sup>

Having argued that the Vedas represent an originally written tradition, Goody must account for the strong claims to the contrary, both by the conservators of the Vedas themselves and their western counterparts. The written Veda would have been preserved orally because of the great difficulty of making and maintaining manuscripts. It would also have been in the brahman’s interests to restrict the instruction of the Veda to the oral medium; as he puts it, “by retaining control over the process of transmission, we render our jobs more secure.”<sup>34</sup> This is a variation on the familiar “greedy brahman” theory, by which access to the sacred formulae is jealously guarded in order to maintain a monopoly on the fees charged for the performance of rites, a charge that dates back at least to the Cārvākas.<sup>35</sup> Goody offers no thoughts on why, if the Vedas are indeed the product of a written tradition, the claim to their oral nature has so long been accepted by western Sanskritists.

One such Sanskritist, Harry Falk, has reviewed Goody’s argument and demonstrated the ways in which Goody has misread and misrepresented a limited group of secondary sources in order to make his case for the written origin of the Vedas, all in an effort to support the thesis that motivates so much of his work: that there

is a universal link between writing and “scientific thinking.” That we are unable to conceive of the development of a system as abstract as Pāṇini’s without writing is no proof of Pāṇini’s use of writing; as Falk notes, “this is our fault and not Pāṇini’s.”<sup>36</sup> Frits Staal concedes the role of a written text at some point in the history of the Indian epics, a genre of literature that more closely fits Goody’s thesis. But for Staal the Vedas are something quite apart, conveyed secretly with an insistence on formal accuracy to the exclusion of meaning, apparently a unique achievement in human history.<sup>37</sup>

It is not necessary to reproduce Falk’s and Staal’s refutations of Goody here. A summary of the argument for the oral origin of the Vedas will suffice. The four Saṃhitās are generally thought to have reached their present form by 1000 B.C.E. The possession of writing by foreign traders may have been known at the time of the Buddha in northwest India, where its use was limited to commercial matters. Its alien and hence polluting nature is evidenced in the *Aitareya Āraṇyaka* (5.5.3) which states that the disciple, “should not learn [i.e., recite the Veda] when he has eaten flesh, or seen blood, or a dead body, or done what is unlawful, ... or had intercourse, or written, or obliterated writing.”<sup>38</sup> The earliest archaeological evidence of writing in India in an Indian language, after the still undeciphered Harappan seals, are the inscriptions of the rock edicts of Aśoka in Brahmī script, dated circa 258 B.C.E. The Greek ambassador Megasthenes found no evidence of writing among his hosts at the Maurya court in Patna around 300 B.C.E.<sup>39</sup> Although Indologists continue to debate how long before Aśoka the Brahmī script was developed,<sup>40</sup> there is general consensus that the Vedas, long revered as *vāc*, *śabda*, and *śrūti*, were composed orally and then preserved as sound through elaborate oral mnemotechnics, assiduously maintaining the form with little concern for the content.<sup>41</sup>

### *Human Authorship and Uncreated Speech*

This fixation on the word was elaborated into the famous Mīmāṃsā doctrine of the Veda as eternal and uncreated speech. In seeing the Veda as *śabdaḥpramāṇa*, they argue that were the injunc-

tions in the Vedas dependent on an author, they would be subject to error because humans are subject to error. However, because they do not emanate from a person and are not subject to variations of time, place, and person, instead producing understanding of their own meaning, they are infallible.<sup>42</sup> The Vedas are also eternal because there is no record of their authorship or their composition. Rather, their order has always been established and they are always repeated in the same form. Kumārila says in his *Ślokavārttika*, “The idea in the mind of every speaker is always that, ‘I am uttering words that have been used by other persons’; this in itself makes them eternal.”<sup>43</sup> Thus, the Vedas are like the sun that reliably provides light for the entire world. Any who do not accept this fact are as owls, blinded by the light by which all others see.<sup>44</sup>

By owls, the Mīmāṃsā mean the Buddhists, and indeed none of the *tīrthika darśanas* seems to have provoked such spleen among the Bauddhas as did Mīmāṃsā and its doctrine of the eternal, uncreated Veda. For example, the eighth century Yogācāra-Mādhyamika scholar Śāntarakṣita devotes almost half of his massive compendium and refutation of non-Buddhist doctrines, the *Tattvasaṃgraha*, to Mīmāṃsā, with 845 ślokas given over just to the issue of the Vedas as an uncreated and eternal source of knowledge. In his attack on this position, Śāntarakṣita initially concedes the uncreated nature of the Vedas in order to argue that the truth or falsity of a text is to be judged entirely on the basis of the truth or falsity of its author: a person controlled by desire and hatred speaks falsely, a person endowed with wisdom and compassion speaks truly. Because the Vedas lack an author, the claim that they are true simply cannot be proven.<sup>45</sup> Furthermore, the Vedas do not possess the capacity to provide knowledge without being explained by persons; persons who, because the Mīmāṃsakas deny the possibility of enlightenment, may be fallible and thus provide faulty explanations. Therefore, even though the Vedas may be uncreated, this provides no support whatsoever about the claim that they are infallible.<sup>46</sup>

But in the end, Śāntarakṣita wants to argue that the Vedas are authored works. If they were eternal and unchanging, all the words would exist at the same moment, they would pervade space, and would always remain unmanifest. However, because the words of

the Veda appear in ordered sequence, over specific moments of time, and are manifested through particularities of speech, they must have a cause, an author.<sup>47</sup> The fact that the Vedas are difficult to pronounce and difficult to understand is no proof of their uncreated nature. That they set forth techniques for curing poison proves nothing; such cures are found in other texts as well. Further proof of their human authorship is their prescription of perverted sexual practices and animal sacrifice.<sup>48</sup>

Of course, Śāntarakṣita cannot stop with this refutation but must eventually go on to demonstrate that although the Vedas are not a valid source of knowledge, the word of the Buddha is. In order to do this, he must establish the possibility of a person achieving omniscience, something which Mīmāṃsā rejects.<sup>49</sup> He begins with the logical point that the mere fact that the Mīmāṃsakas have never perceived an omniscient person does not establish that it is impossible that such a person exists; indeed the omniscient person can only be apprehended by another omniscient person.<sup>50</sup> From here, the argument becomes predictable: an omniscient person is to be judged by his or her knowledge of the truth. Apparently reversing the position he used against Mīmāṃsā, Śāntarakṣita claims here that the Buddha is omniscient not because of who he was but because of what he taught, *anātman*, a doctrine unique among all teachings.<sup>51</sup> What follows is a fairly standard Mahāyāna litany of the qualities of the Buddha and his extraordinary pedagogical skills: that he teaches the dharma without the slightest operation of thought, like a wheel set in motion;<sup>52</sup> that he is not subject to the faults of mortal beings because he is beyond saṃsāra and thus immortal;<sup>53</sup> that the scriptures attributed to him need not have been actually spoken by him but sometimes even emanate from walls. Hence, he is not to be regarded as the author of the sūtras, but they are rather set forth under his supervision.<sup>54</sup> Finally, he comprehends everything that exists in a single instant, without the necessity that he knows them sequentially, unless that is his wish.<sup>55</sup>

Despite or perhaps because of the stridency of the Buddhist attack, the long-held assumption that the Mīmāṃsakas and the Buddhists stand at the antipodes on the question of the nature of scripture requires reexamination. Stcherbatsky may, in fact, have been wrong when he wrote in *Buddhist Logic* that, "There is hardly

a single point in philosophy in which both these systems would not represent the one just the reverse of the other.”<sup>56</sup> Both would claim that their scriptures are infallible because they are not the product of human authorship, but rather that they embody a truth that exists without being contingent on human agency. In fact, in the *Samyuktāgama*, the Buddha says, “I did not create the twelvefold dependent origination nor was it created by anyone else,”<sup>57</sup> and the *Vaibhāṣikas* assert that the words of the Buddha are *apauruṣeya*, not of human origin.<sup>58</sup> Whether the Buddhists hold the word of the Buddha to be sound or a conditioning factor, they hold them to be impermanent and here, at least verbally, would differ with *Mīmāṃsā*. However, when the *Mīmāṃsakas* describe the Vedas as eternal, they explain that this means that they have no beginning in the sense of having no author and they have no end in that they are not destroyed,<sup>59</sup> just as the oft-cited passage from the *Samyutta Nikāya* (II.25) states that whether or not the *tathāgatas* arise, the nature of dharmas remains the same. Both employ identical arguments against those who would deny the infallibility of their scriptures: the *Mīmāṃsakas* argue that someone who has no connection with the Veda (that is, who is not entitled to study it) and is hostile to it could never be truthful about the infallibility of the Veda.<sup>60</sup> Śāntarākṣita says that it is impossible for ignorant beings like the *Mīmāṃsakas* to draw any conclusions about the possibility of omniscience.<sup>61</sup> And finally both speak of the sounds being heard without the need to understand the meaning.

The rhetorical affinities between the *Mīmāṃsakas* and the Buddhists in their description of scripture are thus clearly present. From another perspective, however, they appear to be quite different: when the *Mīmāṃsakas* speak of the eternal and unauthored nature of the Vedas, they are speaking of a self-identical sound, whereas when the Buddhists speak of the eternal nature of dharmas as dependently arisen, they are speaking of a self-identical reality; it may be that what we are dealing with is an issue of form versus content. Staal explains:

There is no tradition [among the brāhmins] for the preservation of the meaning [of the Veda], a concern regarded as a mere individualistic pastime. The brāhmins' task is more noble: to preserve the sound for posterity, maintain it in its purity, and keep it from contamination by outsiders. Thus it is saved

from the unchecked spread and vulgarization which attaches to the written word.<sup>62</sup>

A more materialist purpose for the preservation of sound is offered by Falk, who notes that, "a priest gets paid for participating in sacrifices. The oral instruction is not a transfer of meaning but a transfer of tools without which the future priest would not be able to practise and earn his livelihood."<sup>63</sup>

The Buddhists, on the other hand, seem more concerned with meaning, if we are to draw the usual conclusion from the famous account of the Buddha forbidding two brahman converts from rendering his teaching in *chandās*, warning that to do so would constitute an infraction of the Vinaya, that each disciple was instead to teach the word of the Buddha in his own dialect. The term *chandās* has been widely interpreted, but it seems to mean a method of chanting employed for the Vedas which involved melody (*sāman*) and prolonged intonation (*āyatasvara*).<sup>64</sup> What might this distinction, that the śrōtrīyas were concerned with the precise preservation of the sounds of the Vedas while the śrāvakas were concerned with the preservation of the meaning of the Buddha's word in the vernacular, imply about the issue of committing the Vedas and the sūtras to writing?

### *Speech and Writing*

Regardless of one's position on when the writing took place, of whether Goody is right or wrong (and the available evidence points strongly in the direction of his being wrong), it is highly probable that the existence of writing was known to both monks or brahmins by the time of Aśoka, and perhaps a century earlier. The possible significance of the notions of convertibility and totalization suggested by the coincidence in India during the fourth and third centuries B.C.E. of this use of the Brahmi script, the establishment of the Mauryan empire, the minting of coins, and the delineation of the Abhidharma remains to be explored. The question to which we now turn is why the societies of priests, both Vedic and Buddhist, seem to have rejected the use of writing for the preservation of their knowledge until the late dates that have come down to us (late first century B.C.E. in the case of the Buddhists, as late as the eighth

century in the case of the brahmans), whether they, like the utopian society described in *Tao te ching*, “knew writing but returned to the use of the knotted rope,” or were like King Thamus of Thebes, who, as Plato recounts in the *Phaedrus*, refused the gift of writing from the god Theuth saying: “If men learn this, it will implant forgetfulness in their souls; they will cease to exercise memory because they rely on that which is written, calling things to remembrance no longer from within themselves, but by means of external marks.” Socrates concurs, but for other reasons: “And once a thing is placed in writing, the composition, whatever it may be, drifts all over the place, getting into the hands not only of those who understand it, but equally those who have no business with it; it doesn’t know how to address the right people, and not address the wrong.”<sup>65</sup> Lao Tzu seems to long for a return to an oral culture with no need for writing and the displacements it introduces, where all that is needed is a knotted rope for counting things. Plato sees writing as a dangerous technology, capable of inducing the loss of knowledge and the rise of chaos.

The dangers of writing in the case of Vedas are obvious. For a tradition that bases itself on the power of the word (in an increasingly unintelligible language, Vedic), that power being invested in those who can intone it, the introduction of writing breaks the unbroken lineage of authenticity of the recital and repetition of the word, disrupts the self-perpetuation both of truth and society where authority is passed from father to son. Writing permits the absence of the speaker and the sound and, as Socrates warns, allows dissemination of knowledge among those from whom it should be restricted.

Writing here is not only a technology in its more narrow sense (as used by Goody) of a mechanism that leads to new intellectual practices and hence new ways of producing consciousness in society, as important as this is in the Indian context. Writing is also a technology in the wider sense, as a more amorphous, pervasively deployed, institutional practice. It is in this wider sense that Derrida would argue that even if the Vedas were not committed to palm leaf they were already written. If writing is seen as “the durable institution of a sign,” as a means for recording speech so that it can be repeated in the absence of the original speaker and

without knowledge of the speaker's intention, then all linguistic signs are a form of writing.<sup>66</sup> And it is indeed the very fact of its repeatability that Mīmāṃsā put forth as a proof for the eternal nature of the Veda. But there seems to be something else at stake, for in the case of the Veda, we do not find speech standing at a remove from self-present truth, from which writing is yet a further deviation, but rather the sound is itself the truth. The relation of word and meaning is not a matter of convention; the signifying power of the word is eternal, innately conveying its meaning. No arbitrariness of the sign here, where language is claimed not to operate through difference. The identity of speech and truth, of spoken word and meaning, serves to make writing even more suspicious. There is all the more reason for the brahmins to regard writing as a poison.

The Buddhist case is somewhat different. Given the reported wish of the Buddha that his word be disseminated in the vernacular and the apparent Buddhist rejection of caste restrictions, one might wonder what caused the Buddhists to refrain (according to their records) from committing the sūtras to writing for at least four centuries after the Buddha's death. An ideology of the self-presence of speech again provides one possible direction, which points back to the myth of the Buddha's enlightenment, something described as so profound that he only belatedly, and at the urging of Brahmā, decided to speak at all. The dharma, as we have seen, was represented not as something that he created but something which he found, the ancient city at the end of the ancient path through the great forest.<sup>67</sup> His discovery of this truth provided him with the authority to speak, and all subsequent teachings were repetitions of what had been heard from him. Thus, the *Heart Sūtra* commentators specify that what was heard by the rapporteur was simply the words; the form was received but the content was not understood because that content remains the pristine possession of the absent Buddha. The notion of origin from an uncreated truth is as much at play here as it is with the Vedas, so too the power of lineage, of hearing from the teacher what he heard from his teacher, often couched in the rhetoric of father and son, of inheritance and birth-right, traced back ultimately to the Buddha. It is this line of legitimation that accounts for the obsession with genealogy which

one encounters, for example, in Ch'an and Zen and throughout Tibetan Buddhism. Thus, we find in many texts, both Hīnayāna and Mahāyāna, the so-called four reliances: "Rely on the dharma, not on the person. Rely on the meaning, not on the letter. Rely on the definitive meaning, not on the provisional meaning. Rely on knowledge (*jñāna*); not on [ordinary] consciousness (*viññāna*)."<sup>68</sup> In each opposed pair, the former is the privileged term, the latter is the debased counterpart. Writing stands even further removed, the re-presentation of the word detached from the voice of the lineage. It is to signal participation in that lineage that the sūtras begin, "*evaṃ mayā śrutam*."

Whether or not the Vedas and sūtras were written down before the tradition reports that they were, we have sufficient reason to suspect why writing would have remained hidden. For it would seem that what Derrida discerned in the history of metaphysics in the west also pertains to India, where writing also was, "a debased, lateralized, repressed, displaced theme, yet exercising a permanent and obsessive pressure from the place where it remains held in check. A feared writing must be cancelled because it erases the presence of the self-same [*propre*] within speech."<sup>69</sup> If writing was poison for the brahmans, it was chemotherapy for the Nikāya Buddhists, accepted only in order to postpone the demise of the dharma; the *Dīpavaṃsa* reports that the monks in Sri Lanka first had the tipīṭaka written down when they saw the decay (*hāni*) of sentient beings.<sup>70</sup> Yet the brahmans and the Buddhists seem to be repulsed by two distinguishable dangers of writing. The aversion of the brahmans derives from a recognition of the danger discerned by Plato, where writing leads to uncontrolled diffusion and dispersion of the word, out of the memory and into the world. Thus, the unintelligible sounds of the Veda must be precisely preserved in the mind. The Buddhists, on the other hand, hail the dispersion of the dharma in the vernacular, relying not on the word but on the meaning, despite the concern with monastic maintenance of the *buddhavacana* suggested by the *mahāpadeśas*. They thus seem closer to the Romantic view of writing which we associate with Rousseau, in which the written word is the dead letter, removed from the self-presence of enlightenment and its already inadequate reflection in speech.

All of which makes the virtual explosion of texts by which we mark the rise of the Mahāyāna all the more intriguing, a “movement,” which despite its prodigious literature never moved beyond the minority during its millennium in India. It is probably premature to provide a narrative “explanation” of the origin of the Mahāyāna, if such will ever be possible. Yet lacking a linear tale to tell, there are certain suggestions to be made. One can begin by observing that the Mahāyāna sūtras have many of the qualities of the Nikāyas - redundancy, stock phrases, reliance on lists, the very features that lead Cousins and Gombrich to judge the Nikāyas to be oral. The Mahāyāna sūtras differ from the earlier works, however, in their self-consciousness and often exaltation of their own status as texts, as physical objects, with many works being devoted almost entirely to descriptions of benefits to be gained by reciting, copying, and worshipping them.<sup>71</sup> If, as Schopen has suggested, the early Mahāyāna should be viewed as a group of distinct revivalist movements, often centered around a single text, which cannot be easily traced directly from an existing school (e.g. Mahāsaṃghika) or group (monk or lay), then the importance of the writing of the sūtras may have less to do with what the sūtras say than with what they do. Like the Vedas, the form may have been more important than the content, but unlike the Vedas it was not the verbal form so much as the physical form that was the key. The animosity expressed toward the stūpa cult that Schopen has pointed out in many of the earliest Mahāyāna sūtras and the repeated presence of the phrase *sa pṛthivīpradeśaś caityabhūto bhavet* (“that spot of earth [where the sūtra is set forth] becomes a truly sacred place”), suggest that what these early movements wanted was not so much new teachings as new centers for worship. Just as the *bodhimāṇḍa* in Bodhgāyā is a sacred place because it is the site of the Buddha’s enlightenment, so wherever the perfection of wisdom is set forth also becomes a sacred place because the perfection of wisdom is the cause of the Buddha’s enlightenment.<sup>72</sup> With stūpas under the control of more established groups, the new groups required a cultic focal point. The book could then function as a substitute for the absent founder, fulfilling the desire for restored presence, physically standing for his speech, manifest as the body of his teaching, a dharmakāya. Sūtras may have been written (down)

before, but here was a new reason for their writing. While writing might be condemned as derivative and displaced from the animation of speech (and, in this sense, dead), these dead letters could be also valued precisely because they were dead, the leftover, dispersed (and dispersable) remnants of the living Buddha, suitable for framing in a stūpa, as the *Lotus* recommends. What had made books dangerous is what makes them appealing: they are dead. In order for the supplement to function as a substitute, it must resemble what it replaces; the new sūtras must begin, “*evaṃ mayā śrutam.*”

The moment of origin may be unimaginable, as Derrida claims. Even the attempt at imagination creates a certain sense of shame, of violation, of transgression. In his recent work, *Homer and the Origin of the Greek Alphabet*, B.B. Powell postulates that an ancient Greek, his name now lost, was so moved by Homer’s recitation that he invented the Greek alphabet for the very purpose of preserving the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. The reviewer in *TLS* identified the many problems with such a theory, but refrained from cruelly spoiling what was at least a lovely thought by not pointing out that this would have required Homer to dictate the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* twice (and both times very slowly); once for the recording of the works and again to insure that the transcription (which only the transcriber could read) was correct.<sup>73</sup> A similar sense of dis-ease attends our imagination of an unknown Indian writing down the Veda or the *Vajracchedikā*. The Mahāyāna seems to have remained ambivalent about the word, continuing to produce sūtras but making it a minor transgression of the bodhisattva vow to divert support from meditators to those who only recite sūtras. The question of the identity of the rapporteur, then, is the question of where authority should lie: in what is written, or in the testimony as to what had been heard. If there is to be resolution, it would seem to come in the moment that is so difficult to imagine, when a monk puts stylus to palm leaf and penned the words, *evaṃ mayā śrutam eksasmin samaye bhagavān rājagṛhe viharati sma ...*

In the temple called Rokuharamitsuji in Kyoto there is a famous statue of the Heian monk Kuya (903-972), an eccentric devotee of Amitābha. The statue depicts Kuya dressed in rags, with a gong suspended around his neck, carrying a hammer in one hand and a

staff topped with antlers in the other. His mouth is open and from it protrudes a wire to which are attached what appear to be six lingams. On closer inspection, they are seen to be six identical standing buddhas, one for each of the syllables: *Na-mu-a-mi-da-butsu* (Homage to Amitābha Buddha). Here speech does not pass immediately into silence, but instead is always material and is already silent, preserved behind glass, for us to see.

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<sup>1</sup> For a discussion of Nāgārjuna's dates, see David Seyfort Ruegg, "Towards a Chronology of the Madhyamaka School," in L. A. Hercus, et al., ed., *Indological and Buddhist Studies* (Canberra: Faculty of Asian Studies, 1982), pp. 505-530.

<sup>2</sup> The śīla chapter of Asaṅga's *Bodhisattvabhūmi* has been translated by Mark Tatz in a volume entitled, *Asaṅga's Chapter on Ethics with the Commentary of Tsong-kha-pa* (Lewiston, New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1986). The relevant passage occurs on page 64. For the Sanskrit, see Nalinaksha Dutt, *Bodhisattvabhūmi* (Patna: Jayaswal, 1966), p. 112.

<sup>3</sup> For the Sanskrit, see Swami Dwarika Das Shastri, ed., *Mahāyānasūtrālamkāra by Ārya Asaṅga* (Vārāṇasī: Bauddha Bhārati, 1985).

<sup>4</sup> Translated from the Tibetan; sDe dge edition of the bstan 'gyur, Toh. 3856, dBu ma, Vol. dza, 155b6-156a7.

<sup>5</sup> Louis de la Vallée Poussin, ed., *Mūlamadhyamakakārikas de Nāgārjuna avec la Prasannapadā Commentaire de Candrakīrti* (Osnabrück: Biblio Verlag, 1970), p. 367.

<sup>6</sup> On the possible identity of this Nāgāvaya, see David Seyfort Ruegg, *The Literature of the Madhyamaka School of Philosophy in India* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1981), pp. 56-57.

<sup>7</sup> These elaborate strategies of legitimation that abound in the Mahāyāna sūtras suggest that the authors of these texts hoped to convey the impression that the events recounted in the sūtras were "historical" to the extent that historical personages known to have been disciples of the Buddha are given central roles. This weighs against Graeme MacQueen's claim that "It takes little reflection to realize that when the early Mahāyānists defend their sūtras as *buddhavacana* they do not mean by this that these texts are speech of the 'historical Buddha.' " Indeed, sūtras like the *Lotus* as well as the *prajñāpāramitā* corpus attempt to legitimate their claim to being *buddhavacana* by adopting a wider historical perspective, both toward the past and toward the future, than was acknowledged by the earlier tradition. Such a perspective is not, therefore, "transhistorical," as MacQueen suggests but remains very much obsessed with history, as evidenced by the "historical" figures, such as Śāriputra and Subhūti, who populate the Mahāyāna sūtras. MacQueen's point appears in his article, "Inspired Speech in Early Mahāyāna Buddhism II," *Religion* 12 (1982), pp. 49-65.

<sup>8</sup> This point is drawn from Peter Brook's discussion of Freud's Wolf Man case. See his *Reading for the Plot* (New York: Random House, 1984, p. 277.

<sup>9</sup> See Étienne Lamotte, "La Critique d'authenticité dans le Bouddhisme," in *India Antiqua* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1947). Here and throughout, I cite Sara Boin Webb's translation, "The Assessment of Textual Authenticity in Buddhism," *Buddhist Studies Review*, 1 (1984), pp. 4-15. The relevant passage occurs on p. 6.

<sup>10</sup> See, for example, Lamotte, pp. 9-13; Ronald M. Davidson, "An Introduction to the Standards of Scriptural Authenticity in Indian Buddhism" in Robert Bushwell, ed., *Chinese Buddhist Apocrypha* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1990), pp. 300-303; Steven Collins, "On the Very Idea of the Pali Canon," *Journal of the Pali Text Society*, XV (1990), pp. 109-110, note 18; and Lance Cousins, "Pali Oral Literature" in Philip Denwood and Alexander Piatigorsky, ed., *Buddhist Studies: Ancient and Modern* (London: Curzon Press, 1983), pp. 2-3.

<sup>11</sup> See P. Pradhan, ed., *Abhidharmakośabhāṣyam of Vasubandhu* (Patna: Jayaswal Research Institute, 1975), p. 466.

<sup>12</sup> See Lamotte, p. 11 and Walpola Rahula, "Wrong Notions of *Dhammatā* (*Dharmatā*)," in Lance Cousins et al., ed., *Buddhist Studies in Honour of I.B. Horner* (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1974), pp. 181-191.

<sup>13</sup> See Davidson, pp. 309-312.

<sup>14</sup> See Lamotte, p. 5.

<sup>15</sup> Cited in Prajñākaramati's commentary to the *Bodhicaryāvatāra*. See P.L. Vaidya, ed., *Bodhicaryāvatāra of Śāntideva with the Commentary Pañjikā of Prajñākaramati*, Buddhist Sanskrit Texts—No. 12 (Darbhanga, India: The Mithila Institute, 1960), p. 205, lines 14-15. See also David Snellgrove, "Notes on the *Adhyāśayasamcodanasūtra*," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 21 (1958), pp. 620-623. It is important to note that the phrase "whatever is well-spoken is spoken by the Buddha" also occurs in the Pāli canon at *Anguttara Nikāya* A IV, 162-166. See Steven Collins, "On the Very Idea of the Pali Canon," pp. 94-95.

<sup>16</sup> See Vaidya, ed., *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, p. 205, lines 10-12 and Davidson, p. 310.

<sup>17</sup> Davidson (p. 310) notes the presence of the first two in the *Mahāvagga*. The last two are quite similar to what appears in the *Nettiprakaraṇa*, see Lamotte, p. 13.

<sup>18</sup> See Davidson, p. 312 and *Bodhicaryāvatāra* IX.42-56 (Vaidya, ed., pp. 204-212). Regarding *Bodhicaryāvatāra* IX.45a, Davidson remarks that Śāntideva defines "the doctrine of the Buddha as that which has its basis in the condition of a fully ordained monk" (p. 312). However, a reading of Prajñākaramati's commentary suggests that Śāntideva is defining *bhikṣu* in a very limited and polemical sense here, as an arhat who has understood the Mādhyamika emptiness; see Vaidya, ed., pp. 206-207. For a discussion of the positions of Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti on the need for śrāvakas to understand the Mādhyamika emptiness in order to become arhats, see Donald S. Lopez, Jr., "Do Śrāvakas Understand Emptiness?," *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 16 (1988), 65-105.

<sup>19</sup> Richard F. Gombrich, "How the Mahāyāna Began" in Tadeusz Skorupski, ed., *The Buddhist Forum*, vol. 1 (London: School of Oriental and African Studies, 1990), pp. 21-30.

<sup>20</sup> Gregory Schopen, "The phrase 'sa pṛthivīpradeśaś caityabhūto bhavet' in the Vajracchedikā: Notes on the Cult of the Book in the Mahāyāna," *Indo-Iranian Journal* 17 (1975).

<sup>21</sup> K.R. Norman, *Pāli Literature* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1983), pp. 10-11. For a very useful discussion of the possible circumstances leading to this event, see Collins, "On the Very Idea of the Pali Canon," pp. 96-99.

<sup>22</sup> See Cousins and K.R. Norman, "The Pāli Language and Scriptures" in Tadeusz Skorupski, ed., *The Buddhist Heritage* (Tring: Institute of Buddhist Studies, 1989). For a useful demonstration of the persistence of the oral in Theravāda, see Steven Collins, "Notes on Some Oral Aspects of Pāli Literature," *Indo-Iranian Journal* 35 (1992), pp. 121-135.

<sup>23</sup> Gombrich, pp. 27-28.

<sup>24</sup> Albert B. Lord, *The Singer of Tales* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960). For a useful survey of scholarship on the orality issue as it pertains to Homer, see Hugh Lloyd-Jones, "Becoming Homer," *The New York Review of Books*, vol. XXXIX, no. 5 (March 5, 1992), pp. 52-57.

<sup>25</sup> Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (London: Methuen, 1982).

<sup>26</sup> Ong, p. 42.

<sup>27</sup> Ong, pp. 43-44.

<sup>28</sup> Ong, p. 54.

<sup>29</sup> Ong, p. 66.

<sup>30</sup> Jack Goody, *The Interface Between the Written and the Oral* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

<sup>31</sup> Goody, p. 84.

<sup>32</sup> S. Dow, cited by Goody, p. 82.

<sup>33</sup> Goody, p. 188.

<sup>34</sup> Goody, p. 119.

<sup>35</sup> See Richard P. Hayes, "The Question of Doctrinalism in the Buddhist Epistemologists," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 52, no. 4 (1984), p. 651.

<sup>36</sup> See Harry Falk, "Goodies for India: Literacy, Orality, and Vedic Culture," in Wolfgang Raible, ed., *Erscheinungsformen kultureller Prozesse* (Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag, 1990), pp. 103-120. The passage cited here occurs on p. 110. I am grateful to Steven Collins for both alerting me to the existence of this article and kindly providing me with a photocopy. For another critique of Goody, see John Halverson, "Goody and the Implosion of the Literacy Thesis," *Man*, n. s. 27 (1992), pp. 301-317.

<sup>37</sup> See Frits Staal, *The Fidelity of Oral Tradition and the Origins of Science*, Mededelingen der Koninklijke Nederlandse Akademie Van Wetenschappen, Afd. Letterkunde, Nieuwe Reeks, Deel 49, No. 8 (Amsterdam/Oxford/New York: North-Holland Publishing Company, 1986).

<sup>38</sup> A.B. Keith, ed. and trans., *The Aitareya Āraṇyaka* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), pp. 301-302.

<sup>39</sup> See Falk, p. 105. On the date of the Buddha's death and its relation to Aśoka's ascension to the throne, see Hirakawa Akira, *A History of Indian Buddhism from Śākyamuni to Early Mahāyāna*, trans. and ed. by Paul Groner (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1990), pp. 22-23 and Heinz Bechert, "The Date of the Buddha Reconsidered," *Indologica Taurinensia* 10 (1982), pp. 29-36.

<sup>40</sup> Some Sanskritists, such as Falk, hold that the errors, variants, and development of punctuation present in the rock edicts point to a script only newly invented. He thus concludes that "anyone able to distinguish facts from fiction would come to the conclusion that writing in India practised by Indians in Indian scripts can not be much older than 258 B.C." (p. 105). However, other distinguished scholars have reached different conclusions. K.R. Norman finds in the same variations in the Aśokan inscriptions evidence that the script had been in existence in the form that we know it for some time prior to Aśoka, not later than the end of the fourth century B.C.E. See K.R. Norman, "The Development of

Writing in India and its Effects upon the Pāli Canon," *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde Südasiens*, 36, Supplementband (1992), pp. 239-249. J. Bronkhorst has suggested that the Padapāṭha of the Ṛgveda was written down at the time of its composition, not later than the sixth century B.C.E. See his "Some Observations on the Padapāṭha of the Ṛgveda," *Indo-Iranian Journal* 24 (1982), pp. 181-189.

For sources on the question of the origins of writing in India, see William A. Graham, *Beyond the Written Word: Oral Aspects of Scripture in the History of Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p. 199, note 3. See also Oskar von Hinüber, *Der Beginn der Schrift und frühe Schriftlichkeit in Indien*, Abhandlungen der Geistes- und Sozialwissenschaftlichen Klasse 11 (Mainz: Akademie der Wissenschaften und der Literatur, 1990).

<sup>41</sup> See Frits Staal, "The Concept of Scripture in the Indian Tradition" in Mark Juergensmeyer and N. Gerald Barrier, ed., *Sikh Studies: Comparative Perspectives on a Changing Tradition* (Berkeley: Graduate Theological Union, 1979), pp. 121-124.

<sup>42</sup> *Tattvasaṃgraha* śloka 2346-2350. For the Sanskrit, see Dvārikādāsa Śāstri, ed., *Tattvasaṃgraha*, 2 vols. (Varanasi: Bauddha Bharati, 1968). This edition also contains Kamalaśīla's *Tattvasaṃgrahapañjikā*. For an English translation of both works, described by their translator as "rather disappointing; it is purely and almost entirely polemical", see Ganganatha Jha, trans., *The Tattvasaṃgraha of Śāntarakṣita with the Commentary of Kamalaśīla*, 2 vols., reprint edition (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1986).

<sup>43</sup> Cited in *Tattvasaṃgraha* 2291, see also 2286-2288.

<sup>44</sup> *Tattvasaṃgraha* 2351.

<sup>45</sup> *Tattvasaṃgraha* 2351-2357. It is noteworthy that, following strategies used by both Āryadeva at *Catuhṣataka* XII.5 and Dharmakīrti in the *svārthanumāna* chapter of the *Pramāṇavārttika*, Śāntarakṣita rejects this very argument in his subsequent proof of the omniscience of the Buddha, where he claims that the teachings of the Buddha are infallible because their teacher is compassionate, but that the teacher is infallible because the teaching is true.

<sup>46</sup> *Tattvasaṃgraha* 2365-2378, 2394-2397.

<sup>47</sup> *Tattvasaṃgraha* 2421-2422.

<sup>48</sup> *Tattvasaṃgraha* 2787-2789.

<sup>49</sup> For their refutation of omniscience in general and of the Buddha in particular, see *Tattvasaṃgraha* 3128-3261.

<sup>50</sup> *Tattvasaṃgraha* 3268-3276.

<sup>51</sup> *Tattvasaṃgraha* 3322-3344.

<sup>52</sup> *Tattvasaṃgraha* 3368-3369.

<sup>53</sup> *Tattvasaṃgraha* 3550-3551.

<sup>54</sup> *Tattvasaṃgraha* 3606-3611.

<sup>55</sup> *Tattvasaṃgraha* 3627-3629.

<sup>56</sup> F. Th. Stcherbatsky, *Buddhist Logic*, Vol. 1 (New York: Dover Publications, 1962), p. 23.

<sup>57</sup> See Étienne Lamotte, *Le Traité de la Grande Vertu de Sagesse de Nāgārjuna*, Tome 5, (Louvain: Institut Orientaliste, 1980), p. 2191.

<sup>58</sup> See Padmanabh S. Jaini, "The Vaibhāṣika Theory of Words and Meanings," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 22 (1959), p. 107.

<sup>59</sup> *Tattvasaṃgraha* 2103.

<sup>60</sup> *Tattvasaṃgraha* 2088-2095.

<sup>61</sup> *Tattvasaṃgraha* 3394-3396.

<sup>62</sup> Staal, "The Concept of Scripture in the Indian Tradition," p. 122.

<sup>63</sup> Falk, p. 118.

<sup>64</sup> Vinaya II, 139, 14-16. For a discussion of the story and its variants in other Vinaya texts, as well as a survey of opinion on the meaning of *chandas*, see Étienne Lamotte, *History of Indian Buddhism: From the Origins to the Śaka Era*, trans. by Sara Webb-Boin (Louvain: Peeters Press, 1988), pp. 552-556.

<sup>65</sup> Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns, ed., *Plato: The Collected Dialogues*, Bollingen Series LXXI (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961), pp. 520-521.

<sup>66</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), p. 44.

<sup>67</sup> *SN* XII.65.

<sup>68</sup> On the four reliances (*catuḥpratisaraṇa*), see Étienne Lamotte, "The Assessment of Textual Interpretation in Buddhism" in Donald S. Lopez, Jr., ed., *Buddhist Hermeneutics* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1988), pp. 11-27.

<sup>69</sup> Derrida, p. 270.

<sup>70</sup> Cited by Collins, "The Very Idea of the Pali Canon," p. 97.

<sup>71</sup> Gregory Schopen, "The phrase 'sa prthivīpradeśaś caityabhūto bhavet' in the Vajracchedikā: Notes on the Cult of the Book in the Mahāyāna," *Indo-Iranian Journal* 17 (1975), p. 159.

<sup>72</sup> Schopen, pp. 172-173.

<sup>73</sup> Barry B. Powell, *Homer and the Origin of the Greek Alphabet* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), reviewed by J.T. Hooker in *TLS*, June 14, 1991 (No. 4602), p. 29.

# WESTERN ESOTERICISM AND THE SCIENCE OF RELIGIONS

ANTOINE FAIVRE AND KAREN-CLAIRE VOSS

## *Survey article*

### *Summary*

The term “esotericism” refers here to the modern esoteric currents in the West (15th to 20th centuries), i.e. to a diverse group of works, authors, trends, which possess an “air de famille” and which must be studied as a part of the history of religions because of the specific form it has acquired in the West from the Renaissance on. This field is comprised of currents like: alchemy (its philosophical and/or “spiritual” aspects); the *philosophia occulta*; Christian Kabbalah; Paracelsianism and the *Naturphilosophie* in its wake; theosophy (Jacob Boehme and his followers, up to and including the Theosophical Society); Rosicrucianism of the 17th century and the subsequent similarly-oriented initiatic societies; and hermetism, i.e. the reception of the Greek *Hermetica* in modern times.

This article provides: 1. An overview of the historical background of the field, particularly of the emergence of a specific referential esoteric corpus in the Renaissance. 2. A sketch of the ways in which esoteric currents have been discussed since the Renaissance against the background of the prevailing philosophical and scientific paradigms, and later in the context of scholarly research. 3. A methodological proposal (modern Western esotericism is presented here as a form of thought identifiable by the simultaneous presence of four to six components: the idea of universal correspondences; living Nature; imagination/meditations; transmutation; and: concordance; transmission). This leads to the consideration of esoteric studies vis-à-vis other disciplines and forms of thought. 4. A discussion about the distinction between esoteric *studies* and esoteric *worldviews* (or experiences), again with an emphasis on methodological issues. 5. A number of recommendations for the future development of the field of esotericism within the academy as a whole, e.g. relations between esotericism and humanities, the need for scholarly exchanges at an international level, criteria for selection and clarification of data in library catalogues and computer databases.

### *Introduction*

Universities and research institutions have become increasingly open to exploring areas which until now have been neglected because of the concentration of the humanities into progressively narrower specializations. One of those areas is comprised of a vast spectrum of authors, trends, works of philosophy, religion, art,

literature, and music. Characterized by certain common denominators, its elements form a coherent corpus which can be placed under the general rubric "esotericism." Examples of esoteric trends or currents include alchemy; the *philosophia occulta*; Christian Kabbalah; *Naturphilosophie* (i.e., Paracelsism and what followed in its wake); theosophy (i.e., Jacob Boehme and his followers); Rosicrucianism (and the various branches of initiatic societies which appeared subsequently); and Hermetism (i.e., the reception and influence during the modern period of the writings attributed to the mythical Hermes Trismegistus).

It should be noted that the term "esotericism" is currently used in several different ways. Often it refers to a "secret knowledge," or "secret science" (i.e., a *disciplina arcana*), or in other cases to a type of knowledge which emanates from a spiritual "center," and which is attained only after transcending everything, including the prescribed techniques which led to it. (With respect to this meaning, the word "esotericism" is sometimes replaced by "esoterism"—for example, as is the case in the school of Frithjof Schuon—and then refers as much to the ways that lead to the "center" as to the "center" itself.) In the present context, however, we use the term "esotericism" in a third sense: i.e. as referring to a diverse group of works, currents, etc., which possess an *air de famille* and which must be studied as a part of the history of religions because of the specific form which it has acquired in the West since the Renaissance.

This preliminary sketch of the scope of esotericism will help readers understand something of the difficulty of attempting, in the space of an article, to convey anything approaching a comprehensive grasp of the whole. What follows is therefore only the map of a rich and diverse territory—i.e., esotericism in the third-sense—one which we hope will serve as a guide for the explorations of other scholars.

The material here is arranged as follows: First, we provide an overview of the historical background of the field together with a summary of the development of modern esoteric studies. Next, we give a sketch of the ways in which Western esoteric currents have been discussed since the Renaissance. We continue by offering some methodological proposals, which leads to the consideration of

esoteric studies vis-à-vis other disciplines. This is followed by a discussion about the distinction between esoteric *studies* and esoteric *worldviews*, again with an emphasis on methodological issues. Finally, we make a number of specific recommendations for the future development of the field of esotericism within the academy as a whole.

### *I. The emergence and development of Western Esotericism*

The term “Western” here refers to the medieval and modern Greco-Latin world in which the religious traditions of Judaism and Christianity have coexisted for centuries, periodically coming into contact with those of Islam. Our subject essentially involves *modern* esoteric currents, i.e., those which appear in the Latin West at the end of the fifteenth century. It is only then, at the beginning of the Renaissance, that we see the gradual emergence of a kind of collective will to gather together a variety of ancient materials of the type which concerns us here, in the belief that these form a homogeneous whole. Of course, from the beginning of the common era, some of these materials were linked to forms of Hellenistic philosophy and religiosity (e.g., Stoicism, Gnosticism, Hermetism,<sup>1</sup> Neo-Pythagorism) and later to the three Abrahamic religious traditions, but it was not until the Renaissance that the idea of considering them as mutually complementary provided the impetus to search for their common denominators (cf. Marsilio Ficino, Pico della Mirandola, et alia). Thus, especially after 1492, (the date of the expulsion of the Jews from Spain) there is an influx of Jewish Kabbalah into Christian milieus where it is somewhat surprisingly combined with Neo-Alexandrian Hermetism (Marsilio Ficino’s Latin translation of the *Corpus Hermeticum* appears in 1471) in a context characterized by the ideas of analogy and universal harmonies. The more or less explicit project consisted in creating a single spectrum along which all these traditions could be located. We can imagine them being approached as if they were strings or keys on a single instrument, so as to be arranged in a way that could produce multiple harmonies.

Subsequently, the *prisca theologia* of the Middle Ages underwent a transformation and became known as the *philosophia occulta* and

the *philosophia perennis*. These terms were not interchangeable, but were each used to designate a relatively autonomous nebula in the mental universe of the time, one which was detached from theology per se. The historical or mythical representatives of the *philosophia perennis* were thought to constitute links in a chain, and among them one finds names like Moses, Zoroaster, Hermes Trismegistus, Orpheus, the Sibyls, Pythagoras and Plato. At this point, give or take a few nuances, the *philosophia perennis* has become what today is usually called "Tradition."<sup>2</sup> The task of the scholar of esoteric studies is not to prove that such an invisible "Tradition," hidden behind the veil of the history of events, did or did not exist as such before the Renaissance; rather, the task consists of trying to grasp and to describe the different facets of the emergence of this idea as it appears in the imaginary and the discourses of the last centuries.<sup>3</sup>

In the sixteenth century traditions like Hermetism, Christian Kabbalah, "*philosophia occulta*," etc., emerged as a more or less autonomous body of reference which would soon be considered as "esoteric" with respect to the official "exoteric" religion. This autonomization provided the true starting point for what we designate here as "esotericism." In the Middle Ages, such autonomization had not been necessary because the problems that this body of reference deals with were embedded within the prevailing paradigms, i.e., they were generally compatible with theology. For the most part these problems bear on the connection between metaphysics and cosmology; as long as the cosmological domain (that of "second causes") remained subordinate to the metaphysical (that of "first causes"), the various articulations dealing with that connection presented no problem for theology. Of course, while this situation prevailed, the notion of esotericism would scarcely be able to register within the mentality, but once the sciences of Nature were separated from theology, they started to be cultivated for their own sake (in Christianity and Islam this process began to take hold in the twelfth century). When theology cast off what had been formerly part of itself, the result was an enormous abandoned field. This field was quickly reconstituted, "reinterpreted" from the outside (i.e., from outside theology) by humanists with esoteric leanings. The importance of the role played by humanist scholars in the genesis of modern esotericism cannot be

over-emphasized. As a response to the appropriation of philosophy by the scholastics, these Renaissance humanists began to professionalize esoteric branches like Hermetism and the Kabbalah, and in so doing practiced a form of appropriation themselves. It is at this time that esotericism began to be a matter for specialists whose audience was likely to be comprised of those already “in the know”; i.e., of persons who shared the same basic worldviews as did they themselves, and for whom essentially the same body of reference functioned as the object of their inquiry. These humanists dealt mostly with the interface between metaphysics and cosmology, thereby modeling a kind of *extra*-theological method for giving an account of the link between the universal and the particular. In general their speculations proved to be more cosmological than metaphysical.

It was in the light of these Renaissance influences that the field of esotericism developed over the next centuries. Along the way, it assimilated a variety of traditions and acquired a corpus. Let us recall the main currents of which it is comprised.

On the one hand there are three “traditional sciences,” three rivers as it were, which do not seem to belong to any particular epoch, and which are understood more or less independently from the epochs in which they appear: alchemy, astrology, and magic in the Renaissance sense of *magia*. Typically, magic was connected to various types of arithmosophy; i.e., the science of numbers (to which are attached, for example, different forms of musical esotericism). Still active today, all three of these traditional sciences continue to maintain close relationships and interconnections among themselves. Alongside these, we also find the appearance of a number of trends (often starting with a foundational text), like streams hollowing out their bed at relatively determinable moments. These streams are far from being strangers to the three great rivers because they intermingle. From the end of the fifteenth century on they are Christian Kabbalah (an adaptation of Jewish Kabbalah); Neo-Alexandrian Hermetism; discourses inspired by the idea of *philosophia perennis* and of the “primordial Tradition”; and a Paracelsian type of philosophy of Nature (from which is derived the Romantic, partly German, *Naturphilosophie*). From the seventeenth century on, they include theosophy and Rosicru-

cianism (both initially German); and later still, a variety of initiatory societies, all characterized by essentially the same features.

One might well have thought that the rivers and streams would dry up with the Renaissance, but they survived the great epistemological rupture of the seventeenth century, and even the scientism of the nineteenth century did not succeed in making them disappear. They persisted, and today these forms of esotericism are present more than ever before. Now, their tenacious permanence appears as a counterpart to our techno-scientific, secularized vision of the world, but it would be simplistic and erroneous to reduce their longevity to a need to react against the imaginary and *episteme in situ*. Rather than dealing with something which is merely a reaction to modernity, we could very well be dealing with the possible forms acquired by one of the two poles of the human soul for its actualization: that is, the pole of mythic capacity. (The other pole being so-called rational thought, which in the West is modelled after a type of Aristotelian logic.) Thus, the development of these currents from the Renaissance to the present day should be thought of as a continuation of trends of thought and spirituality, rather than as a mere reaction against new philosophical trends of modernity (e.g., atomism, mechanism, etc.).<sup>4</sup>

These currents, works, and authors which we call “esoteric,” constitute a ramified body of material which must be studied in context; that is, in terms of the relations its parts maintain among themselves, and also in terms of its being a function of the diverse religious, political, social, cultural, and even economic contexts with which it is associated. Esotericism thus forms a formidable and challenging corpus, with a highly complex content. It is all the more so since what belongs to it is almost never clearly labeled. Thus, those of us who study it are not only called upon to be scholars, but detectives who are able to follow its often elusive traces.

## II. Studies on esoteric currents

### A. From the Renaissance to the end of the eighteenth century

The “*philosophia occulta*,” as Renaissance esotericists understood it (e.g., Cornelius Agrippa, *De Occulta Philosophia* [1533] or

Giorgi of Venice, *De Harmonia Mundi* [1532] is eclectic in character and encompasses most of what we now call western esotericism (with the exception of those esoteric movements which did not appear until later, in the seventeenth century; e.g., theosophy, in the wake of Jacob Boehme, and Rosicrucianism). It includes the Jewish Kabbalah along with its Christian variant; arithmosophy; alchemy; astrology; and Hermetism; as well as a “magical” philosophy of Nature. For the most part, discussions on the *philosophia occulta* are carried out between its proponents and opponents; any endeavour to study it per se is still relatively rare at this time. Throughout the seventeenth century numerous feuds were mounted against these esoteric currents. For contemporary researchers, these feuds are as interesting as the discourses of the proponents, because the opponents based their criticism on rather sophisticated conceptual grounds. For example, Father Marin Mersenne,<sup>5</sup> René Descartes’ colleague and friend, went to war against the theosophical speculations of his contemporary Robert Fludd, speculations which in a sense were representative of a whole esoteric mindset at the time. Ehregott Daniel Colberg undertook a similar attack at the end of the century, thereby providing us with a descriptive schema of such currents.<sup>6</sup> Within the ranks of the proponents of the *philosophia occulta*, Gottfried Arnold devoted an enormous work on the “history of sects and heresies”,<sup>7</sup> which remains an invaluable reference source for these movements, although he did not conceive of theosophy as a specific domain along the wide spectrum of spiritual currents that he presented. In addition, there were genuinely scholarly treatments of specific traditions, but these were not intended to present esotericism as such; rather, they were merely part of an in-depth erudite presentation of selected areas in literature and philosophy. A good example is Johannes Albrecht Fabricius’ *Bibliotheca Graeca* (1708-27) in which the Alexandrian Hermetic texts and their treatment since the Renaissance are discussed. The first systematic presentation of modern esoteric currents was made by Jacob Brucker in 1743<sup>8</sup> in a massive *History of Philosophy*. For many generations this would be the most widely disseminated work on the topic of the history of philosophical systems and schools.

The appearance of speculative Freemasonry at the dawn of the

eighteenth century fostered a plethora of reflections on the origins of this society, as well as on the origins of esoteric traditions. These reflections often referred to secret teachings of an ancient wisdom, to the mysteries of antiquity, particularly of Egypt, etc. Throughout this century in Europe the numbers of so-called “side-degrees” or higher grades (those ranked above the “blue” ones: i.e., Apprentice, Fellow Craft Mason, and Master) proliferated and served as a kind of catchall susceptible to being filled with all sorts of esoteric symbols: theosophic, Rosicrucian, alchemical, Kabbalistic, Hermetic, etc. The mere existence of such containers for the esoteric functioned to deepen interest in the possible existence of what might be, according to contemporary speculations, a universal Tradition underlying the *membra disjecta* of all specific esoteric currents reflected in these rituals. The alleged influence of the Rosicrucians in the genesis of speculative Freemasonry triggered debates which fostered discussions about the history and nature of Rosicrucianism and, by the same token, about other currents. For example, there are discussions by Friedrich Nicolai<sup>9</sup> and more importantly by Johann Gottfried Herder. Herder occasionally deals with what he calls “esoterische Wissenschaften” (esoteric sciences); in so doing, he is perhaps the first author to use this word in a sense very close to that utilized here.<sup>10</sup> During the same period, Antoine Court de Gébelin published *Le Monde Primitif*,<sup>11</sup> in which he expounded the idea of a tradition underlying all the particular ones, and exhibited a preference for Egypt (in keeping with the egyptomania which was then in vogue). One part of this work was devoted to the Tarot, which the author considered a key for unlocking the secret of the golden thread of meaning which connects each tradition to all the others.

#### B. From the beginning of the 1800’s until 1965

Throughout this period scholarly research developed, although one does not find any general surveys like that of Brucker (see *supra*), or at least none covering such a wide range of material. What appeared was limited to precise areas; i.e., to particular currents. On the other hand, the appearance of the Occultist movement in the middle of the century, which lasted until World War

I, fostered an interest in "occult sciences," the works of Eliphas Lévi<sup>12</sup> having revived widespread popular interest in Kabbalah, tarot, theosophy, and "Magick" in general, while the ongoing activity of old and new esoteric societies (e.g., Martinism, the Golden Dawn, and the *Societas Rosicruciana* in Anglia, etc.) simultaneously contributed to the appearance of books on these subjects.

Romanticism served to generate a good deal of curiosity about newly-discovered Eastern traditions, as well as those of the medieval period and of antiquity. Jacques Matter studied not only the theosophy of Emmanuel Swedenborg and of Louis-Claude de Saint-Martin, but also the history of early Gnosticism, which he related to the esoteric traditions of his era. The noun "esotericism" was used for the first time by Matter (in French, "*ésotérisme*") in 1828, and with approximately the sense in which we understand it here.<sup>13</sup> On a more popular level, for many years, Joseph von Scheible's publications were brought out with the intention of being a comprehensive series of editions of texts, old and new, about esoteric currents.<sup>14</sup> Also noteworthy on the popular level are Georg Konrad Horst's publications.<sup>15</sup> While Scheible and Horst are editors who do not present themselves as adepts, within the ranks of *fin-de-siècle* occultism one can find several authors, like Papus (Gérard Encausse),<sup>16</sup> who do, and who are very instrumental in disseminating information about esoteric currents. The Theosophical Society which was founded in 1875<sup>17</sup> also contributed a great deal to the popularization of ancient and modern esoteric currents, as well as to the idea of a "primordial Tradition" overarching all the particular ones, a view that was simultaneously encouraged by the International Conference of Religions in Chicago in 1893. Midway between esoteric discourse and scholarly research one finds the works of erudite authors like Karl Kiesewetter in Germany,<sup>18</sup> and above all George Robert Stow Mead<sup>19</sup> and Arthur Edward Waite<sup>20</sup> in England. Throughout this period, however, we find again that although academic research proper developed about particular esoteric currents, it rarely develops reflections on esotericism in general.<sup>21</sup>

One rarely finds any esotericist or scholar dealing with the history of esotericism in general, although some specialize in one particular current from 1928 on, the date of Auguste Viatte's

groundbreaking thesis<sup>22</sup> on the illuminist-theosophical current between 1770-1815. Later François Secret did a similar work on Christian Kabbalah in the sixteenth to seventeenth centuries.<sup>23</sup> Notwithstanding the tendency to focus on particular currents, we do find another tendency beginning to emerge here. Thus, we find works devoted to the study of several esoteric currents within a given period, like Lynn Thorndike's *A History of Magic and Experimental Science*,<sup>24</sup> or Will Erich Peuckert's *Pansophie* and *Die Rosenkreuzer*.<sup>25</sup> Reflections on the nature of esotericism begin at that time, for example in some of Robert Amadou's works.<sup>26</sup>

### C. The last thirty years

Just as Viatte's and Peuckert's approaches helped to establish the specificity of a wide field, so too did the studies of Frances A. Yates.<sup>27</sup> Yates' works are devoted to the Renaissance and the seventeenth century, but her approach to the "Hermetic-Rosicrucian" current goes beyond narrow specialization since she clarifies the relations of these movements (Hermetism, Rosicrucianism, alchemy) by demonstrating their interdependence with European political and cultural history. Ernst Lee Tuveson performs a similar service for us with his treatment of the reception of Hermetism in the eighteenth century and in Romantic literature in England and America, and on an even wider scale, so does Massimo Introvigne in his book on the "magical" movements of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.<sup>28</sup> With the exception of Introvigne, these authors hardly ever speak of "esotericism" in the sense that they rarely use the word, but esotericism is in fact the common denominator of their respective works.

Little by little, the development of such studies brought about the realization that all of these currents pertain to a specific domain, and that as a result this domain had to be delineated. Furthermore, as is appropriate in the case of a newly-emergent discipline, esotericism has begun to develop its own methodologies. Pierre Riffard<sup>29</sup> and Antoine Faivre<sup>30</sup> each simultaneously proposed a methodology, the former presenting a general anthropological theory of esotericism, the latter an approach more based on empirical/historical data. Shortly afterwards, another scholar,

Wouter Hanegraaff,<sup>31</sup> also concerned to bring clarity to the conceptualization of the materials we are dealing with, proposed a very useful and workable approach to the idea of “gnosis” understood in its relation to bordering phenomena.

Yet even before these critical theories were elaborated, the realization that there is something like an “air de famille” common to what one can call “western esoteric currents” had oriented the approach of scholars like James Webb and Joscelyn Godwin in North America, Jean-Pierre Laurant in France, Gerhard Wehr and Karl Frick in Germany.<sup>32</sup> During the last few years, journals originally designed to concentrate on one particular aspect of western esotericism, such as *Cauda Pavonis* and *Theosophical History*, have become increasingly open to material from neighboring sectors within the field, and have managed to do this without betraying the specificity of the journal.<sup>33</sup> The journal *A.R.I.E.S.* (Association for Research and Information on Esotericism) in France publishes methodological articles, book-reviews, thesis-reviews, etc., which are devoted to various aspects of research throughout the field of esotericism; it is the only periodical entirely devoted to specialized academic information of this kind.<sup>34</sup> At the same time, symposia, conferences, and seminars in which esotericism is either one topic among others, or the main subject of discussion, have multiplied.<sup>35</sup> On account of its transdisciplinary character,<sup>36</sup> esotericism is particularly well-suited to comparative approaches. Hence, for example, the recent symposia devoted to esotericism and literature,<sup>37</sup> and the work by Karen-Claire Voss comparing esotericism and feminism.<sup>38</sup> Additionally, a number of libraries have been established and are developing collections informed by the concept of esotericism as we understand it here. The most important is Joseph A. Ritman’s library (Bibliotheca Philosophica Hermetica) in Amsterdam, which has four main sections: Hermetism, Rosicrucianism, Theosophy, and Alchemy.<sup>39</sup> Worth mentioning too are Manly P. Hall’s library in Los Angeles, and Oskar Schlag’s library (which now belongs to the *Zentralbibliothek* of Zurich).<sup>40</sup>

Finally we can observe that esoteric studies have not been passed over by the computer revolution. There now exist a plethora of data bases accessible via computer networks which are devoted to works

from one or more esoteric currents. Recently, an academic discussion group was founded called "Alexandria: The Internet Mailing List for the Discussion of the Western Cosmological Traditions." It describes its focus as being on two main areas: history, with emphasis on Hellenistic Alexandria and later scientific and mystical cosmologies of the west, and philosophy, with emphasis on cosmology and philosophy of holistic systems. Only a few months old, it already has more than 120 members from all over the world, most of whom have academic affiliations, many of whom are well-known specialists in esoteric currents.<sup>41</sup>

Esotericism thus understood has also begun to acquire a specific status and character within the academy as whole. That process began in France in 1965, with the creation of a chair of "History of Christian Esotericism" in the Religious Sciences section of the Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes at the Sorbonne. In 1979 the title of this Chair was changed to "History of Esoteric and Mystical Currents in Modern and Contemporary Europe." Thus, for the first time, esotericism was to take its proper place in the official curriculum, and would no longer be merely a question of the haphazard inclusion of ad hoc material considered peripheral to the primary substance of a course.

In 1980 The Hermetic Academy was created in the United States for the purpose of promoting and furthering exchange among researchers in the field of esoteric studies. Today it has a membership of approximately 150 persons, the majority of which have an academic affiliation. The Hermetic Academy is itself a Related Scholarly Organization of the American Academy of Religion (AAR), one of the largest and most respected professional organizations for North American scholars of religion. From 1986 until 1990, under the rubric of "Esotericism and Perennialism Group," members of the Hermetic Academy presented papers and participated in panels at the annual meeting of the AAR.<sup>42</sup> Throughout the United States increasing numbers of scholars are presenting papers at conferences under the heading "esotericism." There is also one case, at the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, where official recognition of esotericism as a graduate specialization in history of religions has been granted.

Thus we can see that research on esoteric currents and authors

has developed steadily during the last twenty years, and more and more it is carried out by scholars who, despite their sometimes narrow specialization, are becoming progressively aware of the “esoteric” context and dimension of their subject.<sup>43</sup>

### *III. Some methodological propositions*

According to the approach of esotericism developed by Antoine Faivre, esotericism can be considered a *form of thought* identifiable because of the presence of six fundamental characteristics or components. Four of these are referred to as *intrinsic*, meaning that all four *must* be present in order for the material under study to be classified as belonging to esotericism. By nature they are more or less inseparable, but it is important to distinguish them for methodological reasons. The other two components are referred to as *relative* because, although they often appear in conjunction with the four, they are not essential in so far as they are not indispensable to the definition.

Here are the four fundamental elements:

1) *Correspondences*. Symbolic and real correspondences are said to exist among all parts of the universe, both seen and unseen (“What is below is just as what is above, and what is above is just as what is below”). We find here the ancient idea of microcosm and macrocosm; i.e., the principle of universal interdependence. It is also said that these correspondences present themselves in a way which is more or less veiled, an inevitability given their nature which is such that it entails that we decipher their meaning. The entire universe is, as it were, an enormous theatre of mirrors, an ensemble of hieroglyphs to be decoded.

2) *Living Nature*. Multi-leveled, rich in potential revelations and meanings of every kind, Nature can be read like a book. The word *magia*, so important in the Renaissance imaginary, truly calls forth the idea of a Nature seen, known, experienced as essentially alive in all its parts, often inhabited by a light or a hidden fire circulating through it. When it is understood in this way, “magic” is simultaneously the knowledge of networks of sympathies and antipathies

which link the things of nature together as well as the concrete operations informed by that knowledge.

3) *Imagination and mediations*. The two are connected and complementary. Implicit in the idea of correspondences we find a valorization of the imagination<sup>44</sup> considered as an “organ of the soul” enabling access to different levels of reality. Imagination functions in conjunction with mediations of all kinds, such as rituals, symbolic images, mandalas, intermediary spirits and the like. (From whence is derived the importance of angelology in this context, and sometimes also the importance of that which transmits, or the one who transmits, in the sense of having a function as initiator or as teacher [“guru”].) It is this form of imagination which allows the use of these intermediaries, symbols, and images for the purpose of developing a gnosis to penetrate the hieroglyphs of Nature, to put the theory of correspondences into active practice, and to uncover, to see, to know, to experience, the mediating entities which operate between the spheres of Nature and the Divine.

4) *The experience of transmutation*. This must be considered as one of the four essential components, otherwise what is discussed here would scarcely exceed the limits of a form of speculative spirituality. “Transformation” is a less adequate term than “transmutation” because it is liable to be imprecise: it does not necessarily signify the passage from one plane to another, nor the modification of the subject in its very nature, i.e., ontologically. “Transmutation” as metamorphosis implies a cooperation between knowledge (in the sense of “gnosis”) and active imagination in order for lead to be changed into silver and silver into gold. The “gnosis” often referred to in modern Western esoteric currents is the kind of illuminated knowledge which results in a state of being conducive to the “second birth”—a basic notion here, particularly within theosophy.

These, then, are the four basic components on which the definition of, and the methodological approach to, modern Western esotericism rests. The two *relative* components are as follows:

5) *The praxis of concordance*. Although this is not an essential component throughout the history of Western esotericism, it is never-

theless a marked characteristic which is found at the beginning of modern times (i.e., end of the fifteenth century through the sixteenth; cf. *supra*, concerning *philosophia perennis*), and which triumphantly reappears in a different form at the end of the nineteenth century. It is evidenced by a consistent tendency to attempt to establish common denominators among two or more different traditions, or even among all traditions, in hopes of obtaining a gnosis of superior quality. This tendency becomes very obvious starting with the nineteenth century, as the result of increased knowledge about the East due to the influence of “comparative religion,” then a new academic discipline. It reaches its zenith when proponents of *traditionalism*, known as “perennialists”, begin to postulate and to teach the existence of a “primordial Tradition,” overarching or underlying all other religious and esoteric traditions of humanity.

6) *Transmission*. Emphasis on transmission implies that an esoteric teaching can or must be transmitted from master to disciple following a pre-established channel and a previously marked path. The “second birth” comes at that price. Two things follow from this: a) the validity of knowledge transmitted by an affiliation with unimpeachable authenticity or “regularity” (the believer must be attached to a tradition considered to have integrity and to be deserving of respect); b) the initiation which is generally effected via a master to a disciple. (Here the idea is that a person cannot arbitrarily choose to initiate himself or herself, but must somehow pass through an initiator).

Studying the history of Western currents of esotericism therefore means first of all identifying the simultaneous presence of the four intrinsic components, and possibly also the two relative components, in the works in which they may be found. Each of the four need not be equally in evidence, but all of them must be present in order for a work to be classified as esotericism. The best way to locate any of these six components in a discourse, a work, a ritual, etc., is not to look for doctrinal tenets, but to try to find evidence of their presence in concrete manifestations like images, symbols, styles, etc.

At this point it seems appropriate to issue a caveat. While there

may be some reason to think that the project of trying to constitute an area called “world esotericisms” (cf., for example, the term “world religions”—the plural makes all the difference), is viable, the project of attempting to constitute a domain called “*universal esotericism*” appears to be one which cannot possibly contribute to establishing our specialization on solid ground. It is perhaps possible to speak of “esotericism” in other cultural terrains (e.g., ancient Egypt, the Far East, Amerindian civilizations, etc.); given that possibility—which is not our concern—the temptation to go further, by trying to apprehend a universal esotericism, by seeking some common invariants, is understandable. In one recent work for example, Pierre Riffard tried to present just such invariants.<sup>45</sup> According to him they are as follows: the anonymity of the authors, the opposition between the profane and the initiated, the subtle body, correspondences, numbers, occult sciences, occult arts, and initiations.<sup>46</sup> Riffard’s proposition is different from ours. He seeks the presence of these eight universals from the beginning of the history of civilization, a bold and provocative undertaking, but one which appears better suited to serve as an instrument for investigating areas which are already constituted as academic fields, such as history of philosophy (in its broad sense), or works on the imaginary (those which for nearly twenty-five years have detailed their method), or anthropology (again in the broad sense). The major difficulty with Riffard’s model is perhaps that it is far too global; it aspires to be *too* comprehensive, to be a kind of science of esoteric sciences. Using his model, the elusive field of esotericism would once more escape being made coherent, approachable, manageable, which is what would result from the methodological proposals in the present article, which call for research into elements which are found grouped together either a) spatio-temporally; i.e., within a given historical period or geographical domain; or b) conceptually; i.e., from the moment when names are sought to designate them as a whole.

Methodologically, it appears far more fruitful to begin with the empirical observation that esotericism is a Western concept, and that this concept derives from an ensemble of varied and sometimes problematic materials which are sufficiently challenging when studied within that context. It is a matter of studying the genesis

and the various transformations of these modern Western esoteric currents in a diachronic way which highlights the differences and disruptive factors within specific currents, as well as the affinity or antipathy evinced by these currents in their relationship to one another or in their relationship with other forms of thought. Thus, it is a matter of emphasizing these things, rather than of demonstrating a “continuity” of what would be an overarching esotericism per se, above all traditions.

*IV. Esoteric Studies vis-à-vis other disciplines. The study of esotericism versus the practice of esotericism*

It would seem therefore that the approach outlined here facilitates the delineation of a possible boundary around the field. To be sure, that boundary must be fluid, in keeping with the character of esotericism itself, which we can see incessantly overflowing into the arts, literature, music, politics, the history of culture, of religions, and of ideas.<sup>47</sup> We must invoke the idea of balance when it comes to delineating a boundary around the field, for if the boundary is too fluid, it will cease to function as a boundary at all. Since esotericism is one of those disciplines which is transdisciplinary in character, if it is to be faithful to that character, it must also try to strike balance between fluidity and respect for its own specificity and the specificity of other disciplines, in order to keep from being absorbed. If its transdisciplinary character is thoroughly understood, esotericism will respect the specificity of disciplines, which in turn will neutralize attempts by neighboring disciplines with expansionist tendencies to absorb it. Moreover, esotericism must define its own scope in a way which is not overly globalizing or totalizing so as to keep from being dissolved into a sea of incoherence, of meaninglessness. Keeping this in mind, we can see why a thematic approach may not be adequate for circumscribing the esoteric terrain, since most themes developed in it (for example, androgyny, the Sophia, the World Soul, the angels, the original Fall, the four elements, etc.) pertain to the study of archetypology (like that of the Jungian school) or of mythology, as well as to that of esotericism. Scholars in esotericism may take an interest in themes and/or archetypes, but the field of esotericism does not coincide with that

of Jungian psychology or with the study of the imaginary in general. The mere presence in a work of a theme or of an archetype does not necessarily mean that this work is to be categorized as esoteric. If this were the case (and it is not, because, as we have seen, in order for material to be qualified as pertaining to esotericism we must be able to identify the simultaneous presence of four intrinsic elements within it), that would of course preclude defining esotericism as a specific field.

Our concern is not only the dissolution of the methodological boundaries of the field we are involved in reconstituting. Beyond that, we are concerned with the very status of the historical position vis-à-vis the anthropological position, and vice versa. Between these two positions, the relations which *ought to arise* from out of their complementarity are sometimes blocked because of a reductionist historicism on the part of some, and a totalizing tendency on the part of others. Among other things, in this case we would encourage what could be called a “cross-methodological” dialogue, one which would occur in an open, non-adversarial climate, characterized by mutual respect for the grounds on which differing approaches rest and the rationale which gave rise to them in the first place.

Besides these methodological precautions, other warnings should be kept in mind. Esoteric studies as a legitimate part of *Religionswissenschaft* needs to be distinguished from the practice of esotericism. Of course, a scholar of esotericism may be himself or herself an esotericist, just as a scholar of theology may also be a practitioner of the religious tradition whose theology he or she studies, but within the halls of the academy one does not defend positions of faith per se, although of course one may find legitimate grounds for defending a particular intellectual or philosophical position. Just as it is appropriate in religious studies (as it is usually called in North America) or in the science of religions, (as it is often referred to in Europe) to make a distinction between the *study* of religion and the *practice* of religion, it is likewise critically important to distinguish the *study* of esotericism from the *practice* of esotericism.

Wouter Hanegraaff has recently finished a study in which he presents an empirical approach to esotericism as an alternative to

either the religionist or reductionist approaches. The empirical approach entails admitting that we cannot answer questions concerning theological or metaphysical first principles when starting from empirical positions. It is simply not possible for scholars to ascertain the validity of the meta-empirical. Moreover, just as it is impossible for scholars to *verify* anything which relates to the meta-empirical realm, by the same token, they cannot *falsify* anything which relates to it either. As Hanegraaff explains, since “*qua* scholars, they do not themselves have direct access to the meta-empirical [...] methodological agnosticism is the only proper attitude.”<sup>48</sup>

However, it is certainly true that scholars in fields like esoteric studies are called upon to interpret the behaviors, texts, discourse, and artifacts of those who claim some form of access to the meta-empirical. But such interpretations should have an “etic” character, not an “emic” character; i.e., they should draw on methods of interpretation which are not intrinsically those of the esotericists themselves but which are historical, sociological, psychological, etc. The meta-empirical realm of the believer can be approached empirically only through its historically available expressions, and with the help of methodological tools. Our perspective is that of the scholar, and it is characterized by the utilization of methodological tools which are different from the material being discussed. These methodological tools are comprised of the language and the conceptual models which are considered appropriate for scholarly research. But we leave the terrain of scholarship if we regard the object of our inquiry in terms of a perspective which allows our biases to function as axiomatic foundations, be it whether we thereby try to nullify it, condemn it, or defend it.

The “etic/emic” distinction was originally articulated by linguistic specialist Kenneth L. Pike. According to Pike, the preliminary etic phase of studying a system, or elements in a system (“etic data provide access into the system—the starting point of analysis”), entails using a wide frame which is outside the system and alien to it. The emic phase (from whence he says is derived the “final analysis or presentation”) involves the study of the same system, but this time as a whole, and entirely within the frame generated from within that which is being studied. Pike is very

careful to explain that while these two approaches are not to be considered dichotomous with one another, they are by no means identical with one another, nor are they functionally interchangeable; each approach is unique and both are equally necessary for a full understanding of a set of materials.<sup>49</sup> Here, with respect to these two approaches, we would add that in our view, empathy, rather than sympathy, enables scholars to maintain an empirical position. The difference is not that empathy automatically means being objective and sympathy does not, but that the former is open to criticism, whereas the latter almost always (perhaps always) entails an attitude which is not open to criticism, one which is susceptible to being “closed” by a personal creed or ideology. Empathy, on the other hand, is not susceptible to this; in principle at least, it always remains falsifiable.<sup>50</sup>

Though many of the considerations which have been raised here concern *Religionswissenschaft* in general, it seems particularly important to have focused on them here, in the context of describing the field of esotericism as a whole, for two reasons. First, because of its eclectic aspect, the importance it gives to imagination (albeit very precisely understood), and its marginality vis-à-vis more widely-recognized religious currents and denominations, esotericism is still too often liable to be dismissed as being unworthy of serious scholarly attention, and is therefore marginalized. As experience has shown, however, this is an attitude exhibited for the most part only by those who are merely superficially acquainted with the field of esotericism. In addition, esotericism is often trivialized by being considered as a set of bizarre creeds or spiritual practices, and freewheeling imagination, and this too helps legitimate its being dismissed from serious consideration. Obviously, the information provided here will go a long way towards helping to address the problems that arise from unfamiliarity. Secondly, esotericism is still being established as a new discipline within the academy, and for that reason alone is particularly susceptible to the danger of being misunderstood. Here again experience has shown us that the academic study of esotericism is often represented by thinkers who, regardless of their intellectual training, nevertheless represent much more a particular current within the esoteric tradition itself, one which is characterized by faith positions, rather than by an

attitude of scholarly inquiry, as it is generally understood. This of course is one of the primary reasons for our focus on methodological issues and our emphasis on various distinctions.

### *Perspectives*

There is no doubt that the field of esotericism has produced a rich harvest, and that the efforts of all those who cultivated that ground have borne fruit. Recognition of its significance has become widespread, and esotericism is at last beginning to be recognized not only as a legitimate field within the academic study of religion, but as one which is able to make valuable and significant contributions to the discipline as a whole. Yet these are only the first fruits, and the question we must ask now is, "Where do we go from here?"

First, of course, the discussion of issues related to methodology must be an ongoing one. It is in fact hard to envisage a discipline worthy of the name without such discussion. There is no dearth of suitable topics, many of which are controversial, which remain to be grappled with, far more than enough for the foreseeable future. Closely related to methodological questions we find pedagogical ones. In answer to the question, "What is esotericism?," certainly we have come a long way in circumscribing it, and can now say with some conviction that we have a basic idea of the area which it covers, and the form of thought which we seek to describe. Yet when it comes to the development of university curricula which reflects this new field we are still in the stage of infancy. Those curricula have yet to be developed. Additionally, we note that one of the most important elements in curriculum development is the process of selecting audio-visual materials (e.g., slides, films, musical recordings, etc.) to enrich the presentation of classroom materials. It is safe to predict that in all probability one of the most interesting concomitants of the development of university curricula in western esoteric studies will be a heightened interest in the relationship between esotericism and the arts, resulting in an increase in the numbers of secondary sources which bear on that relationship. Finally, once the process of curriculum development begins in earnest the question which will arise will concern pedagogical *method*: "How do we teach the study of esotericism?"<sup>51</sup> Thus, here

too we will find that questions of method become critically important, and that there will be no lack of issues to debate.

It is also imperative that we begin now to turn our attention toward developing comprehensive, programmatic ways, first, for improving the quality of scholarly information about esotericism which is made available (what is meant by this is explained below), and second, for promoting exchange between scholars.

With respect to promoting scholarly exchange, there are a number of reasons why it should not be limited to local and national levels, but should be international as well.<sup>52</sup> While it may be true that the field of esoteric studies has become a presence within the discipline of history of religions as a whole, such an enterprise can help ensure its continuance as a creative presence by helping actualize its potential to be a resource. To a certain extent this enterprise is already underway, but conscious intention is needed in order to maximize the chance for its success. This exchange needs to occur primarily among two groups. One group would be comprised of those scholars already working in the field of western esotericism in general, and/or who specialize in one or more of its currents, who are isolated from one another. The second would consist of those scholars and those working in other areas in the science of religions. Obviously this involves holding conferences, symposia, and the like, on the theme of modern western esotericism, but it should also involve co-operative, collaborative projects of various kinds (e.g., the editing of a series of books or conferences, and writing projects: books, articles, grant proposals, etc.). Such projects are likely to be extremely fruitful since they entail relatively long term contact, sometimes between individuals and sometimes between academic entities, often based in different countries.<sup>53</sup>

With respect to improving the quality of scholarly information about esotericism, we can begin by recalling that the genesis of the field of modern western esotericism began with the creation of a body of reference (a "referential corpus") from the outset, when it emerged during the Renaissance. Esotericism continues to be based on a referential corpus, but now, in contrast to the Renaissance humanists, when it comes to doing textual research, we do it with the aid of computers. This holds true regardless of whether or not

we use them ourselves, since we all depend on computers whenever we work in a modern library. Card catalog information is duplicated (sometimes surpassed) by databases of library holdings. Bibliographic searches are done with the aid of immense, worldwide databases. We also have computer networks and electronic mail. Dozens, perhaps hundreds of specialized databases are now accessible, not only to librarians, but to academics, as well as those outside academia, via computer networks.<sup>54</sup> At this point we must consider what is entailed in the processes of the selection and classification of data, regardless of whether that data is for use in a computer database, a dictionary, a catalog, a textbook, an encyclopedia, an index for a book, or merely to designate a section in a bookstore. We need to remember that the selection of data for such things is not carried out by computers but by persons. Ideally, their process of selection is an informed one; often, however, in the case of data relevant to a new field like esotericism, it is not informed.

Although it may be less obvious, here we need also remember the importance of category formation in general. All categories which are used to classify data are necessarily dependent on criteria formed by value judgments of one sort or another. There is a complex, circular dynamic which inheres in the process of category formation and in the function of categories which cannot be discussed here. Briefly, that dynamic involves the fact that value judgements of one sort or another are embedded in the criteria which are used to form the categories which are used to classify data. In turn, the categories themselves function as criteria which then help form judgments about the source of the data. In this case the source of the data is the field of esotericism. At present, if we examine the categories used in the classification of data relating to esotericism, in many cases we can find evidence of judgments which are based on criteria that are inadequate. Other times we find they are based on no criteria at all; in other words, we encounter arbitrary classifications. In the worst cases, however, we find classifications which emerge from categories formed by decidedly non-scholarly and subjective views. (Here of course the entire range of things which have been discussed above in connection with methodological approaches to esotericism becomes relevant.) In such cases,

the classifications themselves function to reinforce stereotypical views of esotericism; the same as those we have encountered and have had to combat within the academy. (While we can see this in reference works of all kinds, it is particularly obvious in the case of cross-references.<sup>55</sup>)

The need to provide better information to those who classify and disseminate information is not only important, but urgent. The proliferation of computer networks combined with rapid advances in computer technology, signifies we are in the midst of an historically-unprecedented revolution in terms of scale (information is disseminated more widely than ever before and the amount of information is larger than ever before), and in terms of speed. This means that there is not only a potential for widespread and rapid dissemination of information, but of *misinformation* as well. Therefore, developing ways to communicate information pertaining to esotericism to those institutions and individuals whose profession is the collection and classification of data, appears to be both an opportunity and a responsibility.

Throughout this article the reader can find words which are evocative of nature. Some, like stream, river, and current, refer to water, to movement, others, like field, harvest, and cultivation, refer to earth, to growth. What is interesting to observe now, since this article is a collaborative effort, is the fact that while writing, each of the authors chose precisely the same kind of words, and moreover, did so at the same time, without consulting the other. What we can see, therefore, is that this language is not the result of a deliberate choice, but rather, is something which emerged spontaneously, in the course of writing. When considered closely, this phenomenon suggests there may be more at work here than mere habits in writing styles—it suggests that the very ensemble formed by the materials we are dealing with and which constitutes the body of reference called western esotericism has what might be thought of as having a character of its own, a character which somehow functions to encourage the use of one kind of descriptive language, while at the same time, functions to discourage the use of other kinds. If that is true, then, given our choice of descriptive terms, we can see from the character of this ensemble that it is dynamic, not static; living, not dead. Thus, the field of western

esotericism is indeed a living field. As we proceed with its cultivation, we must approach it as we would any living thing, with care, and perhaps even with a measure of respect, simply in virtue of the fact of what it is, or at least, of what it appears to us to be.

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<sup>1</sup> The word "Hermetism" refers to the *Hermetica*, a collection of writings by different authors during the second and third centuries of the common era which were traditionally attributed to the mystical figure Hermes Trismegistus, as well as to various commentaries, exegeses, etc. on the *Hermetica*. The term "hermeticism" is used to refer to a variety of traditions like Hermetism, alchemy, Kabbalah, etc. See Antoine Faivre, *Access to Western Esotericism* (Albany, N.Y.: SUNY Press, 1994), p. 35, and his article, "Hermetism," in *Hidden Truths: Magic, Alchemy, and the Occult*, edited by Lawrence E. Sullivan (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1989), pp. 49-62.

<sup>2</sup> The meaning of "Tradition" (with a capital 'T') is rather vague and thus lends itself to a variety of interpretations. Essentially this term refers to a set of metaphysical truths which were believed to have been imparted to humanity in primordial time, but which were thereafter forgotten, distorted, or otherwise no longer accessible. It is believed that one can recover the "*membra disjecta*" of this "Tradition" in the teachings of various world religions, where they are found implicitly, and in the teachings of certain privileged figures, like the representatives of the above-mentioned "philosophia perennis," where they are found explicitly.

<sup>3</sup> In the sense that the term "imaginary" has acquired in the humanities, mostly in France ("*l'imaginaire*," "*un imaginaire*"), this noun refers to the images, symbols, and myths which underlie and/or permeate a discourse, a conversation, a literary or artistic work, a current of thought, an artistic or political trend, etc., (whether consciously or not). In this sense, the word should not of course be understood to mean "unreal," nor should it be confused with the term "imagination" which is used to refer to a faculty of the mind. We use the term "imaginary" in our context of Western esotericism because it comes close to the notion of a "form of thought" which is discussed below (see note 44, below).

<sup>4</sup> See Antoine Faivre, "Ancient and Modern Sources of Modern Esoteric Movements," in *Modern Esoteric Spirituality*, edited by A. Faivre and Jacob Needleman (New York: Crossroad, 1992), pp. 1-70.

<sup>5</sup> See Marin Mersenne, for example, *Questiones celeberrimae in Genesim cum accurata textus explicatione* ... (Paris, 1623). On Mersenne's discussions concerning Fludd, see cols 731, 1746, 1749 ff., et *passim*. In the same book Mersenne also deals with Renaissance magic, Hermetism, and Kabbalah. See also Mersenne's *Correspondence*, 2 vols. (Paris: Waard and Pintard, 1932), in which a great deal of attention is devoted to the same issues.

<sup>6</sup> Ehregott Daniel Colberg, *Das Platonisch-Hermetische Christenthum, begreifend die historische Erzählung vom Ursprung und vielerley Sekten der heutigen Fanatischen Theologie, unterm Namen der Paracelsisten, Weigelianer, Rosencreutzer, Quäcker, Böhmisten, Wiedertäufer, Bourginisten, Labadisten und Quietisten* (Frankfurt and Leipzig, 1690-91; 2d ed., 1714).

<sup>7</sup> Gottfried Arnold, *Unpartheyische Kirchen- und Ketzerhistorie, vom Anfang des Neuen Testaments bis auf das Jahr Christi 1688* (Frankfurt, 1690-1691; 2d ed., 1714).

<sup>8</sup> Jacob Brucker, *Historia critica Philosophiae* (6 vols.; Leipzig, 1742-44). See vols. 1, 4, 6. Brucker is an opponent, but his presentation of esoteric movements is very developed. For other authors who have presented similar, though less detailed discussions, see A. Faivre, "Le courant théosophique (fin XVI<sup>e</sup>-XX<sup>e</sup> siècles): Essai de périodisation," *Politica Hermetica*, VII (1993), pp. 6-41.

<sup>9</sup> Friedrich Nicolai, *Versuch über die Beschuldigungen, welche dem Tempelorden gemacht worden, und über dessen Geheimniss* (second ed.; Berlin: Stettin, 1782).

<sup>10</sup> Johann Gottlieb Herder, miscellaneous texts of 1782, published in Herder's *Sämtliche Werke*, edited by B. Suphan (32 vols.; Stuttgart: B. Suphan, 1888). See vol. XV, pp. 57-121.

<sup>11</sup> Antoine Court de Gébelin, *Le Monde Primitif* (8 vols.; Paris, 1773-84).

<sup>12</sup> See for example, Eliphas Lévi, *Dogme et Rituel de Haute Magie* (Paris: Baillière 1855-56); and *Philosophie Occulte* (Paris: Baillière, 1862-65).

<sup>13</sup> Jacques Matter, *Histoire critique du gnosticisme et de son influence* (Paris: Levraut, 1828), p. 83. Cf. Jean-Pierre Laurant, *L'Esotérisme chrétien en France au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris: L'Age d'Homme, 1992), pp. 19; 42.

<sup>14</sup> *Kleiner Wunder-Schauplatz der geheimen Wissenschaften, Mysterien, Theosophie, göttlichen und morgenländischen Magie, Naturkräfte, hermetischen und magnetischen Philosophie, Kabbala und andern höhern Kenntnissen, Divination, Offenbarung, Vision, Combination und schwer begreiflichen Thatsachen* ..., edited by Joseph von Scheible (Stuttgart: Joseph von Scheible, 1849-1860).

<sup>15</sup> *Zauber-Bibliothek oder von Zauberei, Theurgie und Mantik, Zauberern, Hexen, und Hexenprocessen, Dämonen, Gespenstern, und Geistererscheinungen*, edited with commentary by Georg Konrad Horst (6 vols.; Mainz: F. Kupferberg, 1821-26). Despite its title, this work contains a great deal of esoteric material.

<sup>16</sup> Papus, (Gérard Encausse), was an influential popularizer of this kind of literature, and directed a number of journals (his *Traité de Science Occulte* appears in 1888, as does the first issue of *L'Initiation*). The journals at this time are numerous (e.g., *The Occult Review*; *Le Voile d'Isis*, etc.).

<sup>17</sup> The major works of Helena Petrovna Blavatsky (known to her followers as HPB) are *Isis Unveiled* (New York: J.W. Bouton, 1877), and *The Secret Doctrine* (London: The Theosophical Publishing Company, 1888).

<sup>18</sup> Karl Kiesewetter, *Die Geheimwissenschaften* (Leipzig, 1895); and *Geschichte des neueren Occultismus: Geheimwissenschaftliche Systeme von Agrippa von Nettesheim bis zu Carl du Prel* (Leipzig, 1891-95).

<sup>19</sup> George Robert Stow Mead was very active as an erudite scholar and an editor of journals like *Lucifer*, *The Theosophical Review*, and *The Quest*.

<sup>20</sup> Arthur Edward Waite, *The Occult Sciences* (London: Kegan Paul, 1891); *The Secret Tradition in Alchemy* (London: Kegan Paul, 1926); *The Book of Kabbalah* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1929); and many others. Worth mentioning too are the editions of esoteric texts by William Wynn Westcott.

<sup>21</sup> See for example Hermann Kopp, *Die Alchemie in älterer und neuerer Zeit* (Heidelberg: C. Winter, 1886).

<sup>22</sup> August Viatte, *Les Sources occultes du Romantisme* (2 vols.; Paris: Champion, 1928; 2nd ed., 1965; 1979).

<sup>23</sup> Francois Secret, *Les Kabbalistes chrétiens de la Renaissance* (Paris: Dunod, 1964; new ed., Milan: Archè, 1985).

<sup>24</sup> Lynn Thorndike, *A History of Magic and Experimental Science* (8 vols., New York: The Macmillan Company, 1923-58; new ed., New York: Columbia University Press, 1984).

<sup>25</sup> Will Erich Peuckert, *Pansophie. Ein Versuch zur Geschichte der weissen und schwarzen Magie* (Berlin: E. Diederichs, 1943; new ed., Berlin: E. Schmidt, 1956); *Die Rosenkreutzer. Zur Geschichte einer Reformation* (n.p., Jena, 1928; new ed., Berlin: E. Schmidt, 1973).

<sup>26</sup> See for example Robert Amadou, *L'Occultisme: Esquisse d'un monde vivant* (Paris: Juilliard, 1950; new ed., Paris: Chanteloup, 1987).

<sup>27</sup> See in particular Frances A. Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1964; new ed., University of Chicago Press, 1979) and *The Rosicrucian Enlightenment* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972).

<sup>28</sup> Ernst Lee Tuveson, *The Avatars of Thrice Great Hermes: An Approach to Romanticism* (London and Toronto: Associated University Press, 1982) and Massimo Introvigne, *Il Cappello del Mago: I Nuovi movimenti magici, dallo Spiritismo al Satanismo* (Milan: Sugarco, 1990).

<sup>29</sup> Pierre Riffard, *L'ésotérisme: Qu'est-ce que l'ésotérisme? Anthologie de l'ésotérisme occidental* (Paris: R. Laffont, 1992).

<sup>30</sup> Antoine Faivre, *L'ésotérisme* "Que Sais-Je?" Series (Paris: Presse Universitaire de France, 1992).

<sup>31</sup> See Wouter J. Hanegraaff, "A Dynamic Typological Approach to the Problem of 'Post-Gnostic' Gnosticism," *A.R.I.E.S.* (Paris), No. 17 (1992), pp. 5-44.

<sup>32</sup> On all these scholars' works, see the detailed bibliography, "A Bibliographical Guide to Research," in Antoine Faivre's *Access to Western Esotericism* (New York: State University of New York Press, forthcoming 1994). (See note 1, above).

<sup>33</sup> *Cauda Pavonis: the Hermetic Text Society Newsletter*, ed. by Standon W. Linden. Bi-annual, since 1982. Direct correspondence to Stanton W. Linden, Dept. of English, Washington State University, Pullman, WA 99164-5020 US. *Theosophical History. A Quarterly Journal of Research*, ed. by James S. Santucci. Since 1985. See also its satellite, the *Theosophical History Centre*, ten volumes published thus far. Correspondence should be directed to James S. Santucci, Dept. of Religious Studies, California State University, Fullerton, CA 92634-4080 US.

<sup>34</sup> A.R.I.E.S., Paris. Since 1985 eighteen issues have been published by La Table d'Émeraude. Correspondence should be directed to A. Faivre, 8, Chemin Scribe, 92190 Meudon, France.

<sup>35</sup> For example, *500 Years of Gnosis in Europe*, a symposium held in Moscow, in March, 1993. A catalog of the accompanying exhibition, entitled *500 Years of*

*Gnosis in Europe. Exhibition of Printed Books and Manuscripts from the Gnostic Tradition.* Moscow & St Petersburg, was published under the auspices of the *Bibliotheca Philosophica Hermetica* (In de Pelikaan: Amsterdam, 1993). A. Faivre, W.J. Hanegraaff, M.A.G.Th. Kloppenborg, J. Platvoet and K.-C. Voss have organized a symposium devoted to "Western Esotericism and the Science of Religions" for the 17th International Congress of the International Association for the History of Religions (IAHR) which will be held in Mexico City in August 1995.

<sup>36</sup> Physicist Basarab Nicolescu has published widely on the meaning and implications of the "transdisciplinary approach". His research shows that the word "transdisciplinarity," is a recent term (appearing only during the past thirty or forty years) which developed from out of a "collective creation, popularized by the work and the personality of Jean Piaget." Nicolescu has documented its use by thinkers as diverse as Jean Piaget, Erich Jantsch, Andre Lichnerowicz, and Edgar Morin. See also Antoine Faivre, "500 Years of Esotericism: A New Transdisciplinary Field for the Academy," a paper given at the symposium "500 Years of Gnosis in Europe," Moscow, March, 1993 (see note 31). Cf. Nicolescu's remarks on esotericism's "*tendance transdisciplinaire*," in "*Vers la Transdisciplinarité*," a paper presented to the colloquium on "*Science et gnose*," (Sorbonne, Paris, June 4-5, 1993) and the "*Colloque de Locarno. 'Errances et convergences'*" (Monte Verità, Ascona, September 3-5, 1993) and published in *Passerelles* (Paris) No. 7, pp. 102-115, 1993.

<sup>37</sup> For example, see *Création littéraire et traditions ésotériques (XVe-XXe siècles)*, ed. by James Dauphiné. Proceedings of the Colloquium of the University of Pau, November 1989. (Pau: J. and D., 1991).

<sup>38</sup> See Karen Voss, "Is There a 'Feminine' Gnosis?: Reflections on Feminism and Esotericism," *A.R.I.E.S.* (Paris) No. 14 (1992), pp. 5-24.

<sup>39</sup> All correspondence should be directed to *Bibliotheca Philosophica Hermetica*, Bloemgracht 19, 1016 KB, Amsterdam C, The Netherlands.

<sup>40</sup> See the library's catalogue *Alchemy: A Comprehensive Bibliography of the Manly P. Hall Collection of Books and Manuscripts*, ed. by Ron Charles Hogart. (Los Angeles: The Philosophical Research Society, 1986). Oskar Schlag's library will be opened to the public in 1996. For other specialized libraries, see A. Faivre, *Accès ...*, (see note 1, above), pp. 388-390. In English, "A Bibliographic Guide for Research," in *Access to Western Esotericism*, cited above, in note 32.

<sup>41</sup> The e-mail address for "Alexandria: The Internet Mailing List for the Discussion of the Western Cosmological Traditions" is [alexandria@world.std.com](mailto:alexandria@world.std.com). List owner is David R. Fideler. Mailing address: Phanes Press, P.O. Box 6114, Grand Rapids, MI 49516 US. E-mail address: [phanes@aol.com](mailto:phanes@aol.com).

<sup>42</sup> The Hermetic Academy (Co-Directors James B. Robinson and Karen-Claire Voss) is a Related Scholarly Organization of the American Academy of Religion (AAR). (It publishes an occasional newsletter, *Hermes*. Correspondence should be directed to James Burnell Robinson, Dept. of Philosophy and Religion, University of Northern Iowa, Cedar Falls, Iowa 50614-0501 US.) From 1984-1985, The Hermetic Academy initially held sessions at the annual AAR meeting under the rubric "Esotericism and Perennialism Consultation." Subsequently, its status was changed to that of "Group," and from 1986-1990, under the new rubric "Esotericism and Perennialism Group," The Hermetic Academy held sessions at the annual meeting of the AAR in which thirty-six papers were presented on no

less than ten separate themes. Recently, one of its members, James Santucci, a specialist in theosophy and theosophical movements, brought together a committee comprised of A. Faivre, J. Godwin, K.-C. Voss (all members of The Hermetic Academy), and J.-P. Laurant, which made a successful petition to the AAR for a Seminar devoted to "Theosophy and Theosophic Issues." The Seminar convened for the first time at the 1993 annual meeting of the AAR to present and discuss material on the theme of "Theosophy and its Phases of Development." At the end of its five year term, it plans to publish a volume based on this research.

<sup>43</sup> See A. Faivre's bibliography (cited note 32, above).

<sup>44</sup> In this context, it is the "creative imagination," or "*imaginatio activa*" (as opposed to the "*maîtresse d'erreur et de fausseté*" mocked by Pascal). In most theosophies, it is supposed to enable one to have access to the intermediate realms (the mesocosmos, between the divine and nature), i.e., to those of the "subtle bodies," angelic or archetypal entities (thus understood, it corresponds to what Henry Corbin has called the "*mundus imaginalis*"—the "imaginal world"). More generally, the "active" or "creative" imagination is the visionary faculty which enables us to grasp the multi-leveled meanings of the Holy Writ and of the book of Nature.

<sup>45</sup> See Pierre A. Riffard, *L'Esotérisme* (Paris, R. Laffont, 1990) pp. 311-364.

<sup>46</sup> By the "subtle" ("*le subtil*"), one means what is not really material but nevertheless is endowed with a "subtle body" ("*le corps subtil*"), for example, the angels.

<sup>47</sup> With respect to the history of ideas, one of the more interesting aspects of contemporary esotericism is the manner in which some of its representatives adapt to modernity (even postmodernity), while other reject it.

<sup>48</sup> See Wouter J. Hanegraaff, "Empirical Method in the Study of Esotericism." Hanegraaff accepts the distinction between reductionistic, religionistic and empirical approaches made by Jan Platvoet in *Comparing Religions: a Limitative Approach* (Mouton & Co., The Hague, Paris, 1982) and also Platvoet's methodological distinction between a "one tier" and a "multiple tier cosmology" ("The Definers Defined: Traditions in the Definition of Religion", in *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 2:2 1990) as a starting point for his own brilliantly-argued presentation of what he calls "the empirical option." (Hanegraaff completed his study while we were in the midst of writing the present article, and we are extremely grateful to him for making a manuscript copy of it almost immediately available, and for giving us permission to cite it and quote from it here.)

<sup>49</sup> See Kenneth L. Pike, *Language in Relation to a Unified Theory of the Structure of Human Behavior* (2nd, rev. ed. Mouton & Co.: The Hague, Paris. 1967), pp. 38-39 *et passim*. In a personal communication to the authors (December 1992) Wouter Hanegraaff explained the way in which he, Jan Platvoet, and others have utilized the emic/etic distinction, adding that they find it particularly helpful for analyzing the status of interpretation in the science of religions.

<sup>50</sup> In a personal communication (*op. cit.*) Wouter Hanegraaff made an analogous observation concerning the differences between empirical and religionist interpretations.

<sup>51</sup> One excellent model for developing pedagogical approaches to the field could be the Berkeley/Chicago/Harvard Project for the Study of Religion (B/C/H Project) which organized around the idea of "teaching teachers how to teach." One of the largest awards ever made in the history of the National Endowment for the

Humanities (NEH), the initial grant period was three years; subsequently, funding was awarded for two additional years. Among other things, the project sponsored a series of six-week summer institutes for college teachers on the topic of how to teach the introductory course in world religions. Leading specialists in the discipline were invited guest speakers at these institutes. The project also produced three textbooks, each compiled by one of the three graduate institutions which headed the project (we note here that each text reflected a different methodological approach) and a series of lectures on comparative religions at one of those institutions. Worth noting too is the fact that one offshoot of the B/C/H Project was writing a separate, and successful, proposal for NEH funding for the purpose of developing visual aids for use with religious studies curricula.

<sup>52</sup> Several years ago, in response to the perceived need for a venue in which to develop international exchanges, the American Academy of Religion formed the Ad Hoc Committee on International Connections. Antoine Faivre was one of the scholars invited to participate in the proceedings of that committee at the November 1993 meeting of the American Academy of Religion which was held in Washington, D.C.

<sup>53</sup> To take only one example, in the United States, we find that the NEH offers an "Interpretive Research Program" which is explicitly designed to "promote [and to fund] joint research efforts [in the humanities which] encourage the open exchange of ideas [and] stimulate scholarly research." Two of the three examples included in the NEH literature pertaining to this program were actual international projects (two are designed to fund research; the third for funding conferences); all of them invite the kind of collaborative efforts to which we are referring here.

<sup>54</sup> For example, the spring 1993 issue of the American Academy of Religion's quarterly bulletin, *Religious Studies News* announced the publication of *The Electric Mystic's Guide to the Internet: A Directory of Electronic Documents, Online Conferences, Serials, Software, and Archives Relevant to Religious Studies* (2 vols.; 1993) An invaluable reference tool, it was compiled by Michael Strangelove (Dept. of Religious Studies, Univ. of Ottawa). Strangelove is also listowner of a massive database called CONTENTS containing information about publications and pedagogical material in the field of religious studies; e.g., bibliographies, dissertations, and course syllabi, etc.

<sup>55</sup> Another area where the problem of inadequate or wrong classification must be addressed is that of the categories used by public and private funding sources of grants and scholarships and by professional associations which provide and/or gather information about dissertations and theses. In both cases, such classification functions to restrict research in fields like esoteric studies which are thereby (tacitly) deemed unacceptable.

## BENSON SALER, "CONCEPTUALISING RELIGION"

DONALD WIEBE

### *Review article*

BENSON SALER, *Conceptualising Religion. Immanent Anthropologists, Transcendent Natives, and Unbounded Categories* (Studies in the History of Religions. NUMEN bookseries, ed. by H.G. Kippenberg and E.T. Lawson, vol. 56)-Leiden, New York, Köln: E.J. Brill 1993 (X + 292 p.) ISBN 90 04 09585 3 (cloth) US\$ 80.00.

In this book Saler focuses his attention on the problems attending the definition of religion in various academic discourses. "Religion," he argues, is a (Western) folk-category that requires clarification if it is to become an analytically useful category which is able to facilitate transcultural research and understanding (1). He quite rightly notes, however, that "[e]lecting a conceptualization of religion that is neither intellectually simplistic nor transculturally inappropriate is not a simple matter" (74). What is needed, he insists, is a notion of religion which allows the anthropologists, (or ethnographers, or students of religion), to transcend the professionally approbated "domains of reality" or "realms of discourse" within which they operate to attain some understanding of "the other," (i.e., the native), who is being studied and who, therefore, by virtue of the possession of different language-games and discourses, transcends the scientists/scholars. And it is the exploration of the conceptual options available to scientists and other scholars in search of a definition of religion that will assist in bridging, at least to some degree, the perspectival gap between the anthropologists (and other interested students of religion) and natives to which Saler applies himself here.

Saler, in the Introduction, begins his exploration of those conceptual options regarding "religion" by contrasting essentialist and nominalist approaches to the task of definition which lead, respectively, to the use of digital and analogue scales in representing religion(s). The latter he suggests are preferable since "definitions" of religion deriving from an analogue approach are unbounded and therefore, as he argues in chapter 7, more likely to be of assistance in bridging "the gap between 'immanent anthropologists' and 'transcendent natives'" (25).

In chapters 1 and 2 Saler treats a variety of matters related to the ques-

tion of the definition, whether positively or negatively so, and pays particular attention to the role of the notion of the transcendent. Though recognizing the force of arguments against the use of the notion of religion, like those of W.C. Smith for example,<sup>1</sup> Saler points out that anthropologists still nevertheless “appear to favor, on general principles, refining or reforming well used categories,” rather than simply dropping them (69). He proceeds then to argue that, after positing need for an explicit definition, one not simply provide a definition of religion but also show how it can be used productively (85).

At the end of chapter two Saler gives notice that he will advocate the rejection of traditional monothetic definitions—along with their essentialists commitments—“in favor of a family resemblance approach to the category religion” (85), but he still, nevertheless, reviews the nature and value of various types of monothetic definitions in chapters 3 and 4 in order to show their deficiencies as tools for anthropological understanding of the anthropological data. Their fundamental problem, according to Saler, is that they attempt to provide wholly unambiguous boundaries to the notion so that religious phenomena will be able to be easily sorted out from non-religious phenomena. That constitutes a problem because, he claims, borderline cases emerge which cannot be settled by the definition adopted. As he puts it, “The phenomena commonly comprehended by applications of the word “religion” are too complex and variable, and often too enmeshed with other phenomena in a larger universe, to be confined analytically within sharp, impermeable boundaries” (197). If, however, we do not use “religion” as designating some abstract, universal meaning which we then conflate with some supposed “reality in the world,” Saler thinks the word can be put to fruitful use by anthropologists.

In the final three chapters of the book (chapter 5, 6, and 7) Saler attempts to provide an alternative way of putting the notion of religion to use. In chapter five he argues that a multi-factorial approach to conceptualizing religion can be of enormous benefit to the anthropologist. A polythetic notion of religion that would emerge from such an approach to definition, he then argues, could be very fruitfully employed in clearly delimited areas in the study of religions. “Where, for instance,” he writes, “we suppose that we can identify phenomenal entities, and where we initially hypothesize that those entities in some sense or other pertain to a group, treating them *as if* they were *denota* of a classification and comparing them multidimensionally would seem to be methodologically sound in testing our initial hypothesis and perhaps in considering others” (194-195). The study of Hinduism, he suggests as an example, might well

be advanced by an application of numerical phenetics (195). Saler, however, then moves to another multifactorial approach to conceptualizing religion, one which "[v]iewed philosophically ... pivots on the concept of family likeness, and it expands on that concept in the languages of the contemporary cognitive sciences" (196), which he examines in chapter 6. The significance of the idea of family resemblance, he argues there, is considerably increased by work on prototype theory which, he is convinced, can show that there is no need for anthropologists to rely any further upon monothetic definitions with respect to religion (198).

Saler devotes chapter 6 to examining the value of taking mainstream Judaism, Christianity, and Islam as prototypical of the category of religion (212). It must be noted, however, that in doing so Saler dissociates his use of the notion of prototypicality from the everyday meaning of "prototype." His notion of the prototype, that is, implies the making of judgments about degrees of prototypicality and does not, in the case of "religion" suggest that these religious traditions are superior to others. Taking these religions as prototypical in his sense he, therefore, argues, would involve conceptualizing religion "for analytical purposes in terms of a pool of elements that often cluster together but that may do so in greater or lesser degrees" (213). In this sense, then, such religions, even though they do not directly enter into the structure of the analytical category, can function as markers that can map a productive starting point for the study of religious phenomena since "those families of religion are connected in complex ways to the development of religion as a Western category, and ideas about them continue to influence how Westerners and persons educated in the West use the term religion" (227).

Saler admits the ethnocentrism of such an approach, but attempts in the final chapter of the book (chapter 7) to show that it can be appropriately tempered. One must first recognize, he claims, that all study of other cultures is, of necessity, ethnocentric, but not on that account necessarily hegemonic and imperialistic. To insure against such hegemony and imperialism, he maintains, we can make the use of native categories and classifications central to our analyses and so effect a certain distancing. He writes: "Conceiving of our type case, religion, as an unbounded analytical category provides an example of how we might bridge the immanence of anthropologists and the transcendence of the natives. As an unbounded category based on our apperceptions of family resemblances, religion serves as a two-way analytical bridge that facilitates back-and-forth travel in the establishment and contemplation of analogies. By travelling this bridge in both directions, indeed, we distance ourselves

from its poles as we compare them. Comparison, the establishment of what we take to be similarities and differences and the weighting of them relevant to some purpose, promotes distancing" (260). Adopting this kind of strategy, he then concludes, gives some ground for hope that we can "produce a more polyphonic and multicultural anthropology than would otherwise be possible" (264).

There is much sense in what Saler proposes in this book. Whether his proposals are as radical as he thinks them to be may, however, be questionable. Though some scholars in the field of religious studies may still argue for doing without the notion of religion—W.C. Smith, for example—those who do still invoke the concept are, I think, less monothetic in their approach than Saler suggests.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, Saler's own proposals do not, I think, entirely escape the criticisms he launches against monothetic definitions. Talk of "resemblances" instead of "universals" in the formation of our concepts, for example, allows the world of experience, as he puts it, to bulge through their boundaries in that they refuse to posit necessary and sufficient conditions of identification; but they must, nevertheless, still set some limit(s) determining inclusion or exclusion of phenomena "covered" by the concept if the concept is meant to connect in some fashion or other with the world beyond concepts. And Saler admits as much: "In extending the category label to certain phenomena among non-Western peoples, we are claiming some similarity to what we deem an important aspect of human life in the West. We generally claim or imply, moreover, that we do so because of apperceived similarity: that is, that we do not create the similarity simply by extending the term, but that we apply the term because we discern some similarity" (259). His claim that positing resemblances is an act of judgment that is assisted by unbounded categories, however, is ambiguous, for if one takes the notion "unbounded" strictly, all experience can be included, and if it is not to be taken strictly, even the unbounded concept will involve exclusion of some of experienced reality and will, therefore, create the same problem of "borderline cases" discussed by Saler in connection with monothetic definitions. Moreover, those using what Saler refers to as monothetic definitions have also, I think, recognized "that something may be more or less of a religion than something else" (260-261) and have, therefore, adjusted their definitions by allowing for the existence of such "things" as "quasi-religious phenomena," or "surrogate religions," and the like, and for good reasons (as Blumenberg's critique of certain Christian readings of the Enlightenment, for example, illustrates).<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, whether the polythetic classifications of Alston or Southwold,<sup>4</sup> discussed by Saler in chapter five,

are as polythetic as they first appear is a question I think can be seriously raised; whether they are any more polythetic than those currently used by many scholars in the field of religious studies is seriously to be doubted. Finally, I am not persuaded of Saler's claim that the ethnocentrism of his prototype approach to the problem of the definition of religion can be sufficiently tempered and tamed to be broadly, (cross-culturally), employed.

Whether or not one is persuaded of Saler's convictions about a prototypical approach to the problem of the definition of religion, (amongst other concepts), however, his discussion of the problem for anthropological studies will be of immense help for students of religion, for it will help them to be far more critical of their central categories than heretofore.

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<sup>1</sup> In his *The Meaning and End of Religion: A New Approach to the Religious Traditions of Mankind*. In chapter five—"Is the Concept ["religion"] Adequate?"—Smith argues for rejecting the use of the notion of religion both in the singular and plural: "The concept of religion and the religions, we conclude, both in practice is being dropped and in principle ought to be dropped altogether" (152). As he had already put it in the introduction: "Neither religion in general nor any one of the religions, I will contend, is in itself an intelligible entity, a valid object of inquiry or of concern either for the scholars or for the man of faith" (12).

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, J.M. Kitagawa's "Primitive, Classical, and Modern Religions: A Perspective On Understanding in the History of Religions," in J.M. Kitagawa, (ed.), *The History of Religions: Essays on the Problem of Understanding*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), or Ninian Smart's *The Religious Experience of Mankind*, (London: Collins-Fontana, 1971)—especially "Dimensions of Religion" in the introductory chapter. It appears, as a matter of fact, that those in the past who have taken the "prototypical approach" Saler suggests may have been less polythetic in their approach than those who have tried to provide the "discipline" with a definition of religion.

<sup>3</sup> H. Blumenberg, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, Robert M. Wallace, trans., (Cambridge Mass.: MIT Press, 1983)—part I: "Secularization: Critique of a Category of Historical Wrong." Blumenberg, that is, argues that modernity is not simply the product of the secularization of Christian ideas but has, rather, a legitimacy of its own.

<sup>4</sup> Saler here refers to William P. Alston's article "Religion" in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Vol. 7; Paul Edwards (ed.), (New York: Macmillan and the Free Press, pp. 140-145), and to Martin Southwold's article "Buddhism and the Definition of Religion" in *Man*, Vol. 13, 1978; pp. 362-379.

JEAN BOTTÉRO, "MESOPOTAMIA: WRITING, REASONING,  
AND THE GODS"

KAREL VAN DER TOORN

*Review article*

JEAN BOTTÉRO, *Mesopotamia: Writing, Reasoning, and the Gods*. Translated by Zainab Bahrani and Marc Van De Mieroop—Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press 1992 (xii + 311 p.) ISBN (cloth) 0-226-06726-2. First published as *Mésopotamie. L'écriture, la raison et les dieux* (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1987).

This translation of fifteen essays by Jean Bottéro is to be welcomed as an important service to an English-speaking audience with an interest in the culture and religion of ancient Mesopotamia. Bottéro is one of the masters of French Assyriology. Yet he is more than a decipherer of clay tablets. Though an eminent philologist, his interests go beyond the problems of grammar and the editing of texts. With Wilfred Lambert and Johannes van Dijk, Bottéro ranks as one of the European specialists on Mesopotamian religion. The width of his vision, his profound knowledge of Mesopotamian culture, his humor and wit make him one of the few who are capable to entertain a general audience about subjects that are ordinarily looked upon as dull and dry.

Until recently, English-speaking students of religion depended on other writers for their knowledge about Mesopotamian religion. One thinks of the works by Thorkild Jacobsen (*The Treasures of Darkness* [New Haven & London, 1976], *Towards the Image of Tammuz* [ed. William L. Moran; Cambridge, 1970], or his contribution to Henri Frankfort's *The Intellectual Adventure of Ancient Man* [Chicago & London, 1946]) and A. Leo Oppenheim (such as the section on religion in his *Ancient Mesopotamia. Portrait of a Dead Civilization* [Chicago & London, 1964; Rev. Ed. 1977]), or Willem H. Ph. Römer's chapter on 'Religion of Ancient Mesopotamia' in Bleeker & Widengren, *Historia Religionum, I; Religions of the Past* (Leiden, 1969). It is fortunate that Bottéro can now be added to this selective list.

Bottéro writes a superb French; translating such French into English is no small accomplishment, and the translators are to be congratulated with their performance. Not being a native speaker of English (nor of French, for that matter), I am poorly equipped to savor the finesses of the transla-

tion. Most readers will probably be able to see some French idiom through the English. This effect may have been deliberate, though, as it lends a certain charm to the book. In some cases, however, the translators have not been free of a certain naivety. What is the use of telling an anglophone audience that they have to pronounce the 'u' in transcriptions as 'ou,' thus pronouncing Uruk as Ourouk (p. ix)? And since we are dealing with transcriptions, why was the French custom of using the circumflex adopted, irrespective of whether a vowel is contracted or simply long? It would have been easy to conform to the transcriptions of the *Chicago Assyrian Dictionary*. In some places the choice of an English term is not entirely felicitous. Thus the word *gâchis* is better rendered as 'waste' than as 'mess' (p. 17; French edition p. 32). But such are minor points in view of the overall success of the translation.

The book is a collection of essays, most of them published separately before. Though written over a period of some twenty years, they display a remarkable unity in style and orientation. The fifteen essays are divided over four sections: Assyriology, Writing, Institutions and Mentality, and Religion. For the readership of this journal the latter two sections are of particular interest. They contain contributions on Oneiromancy (pp. 105-124; see now Jean-Marie Durant, 'Les rêves', *Archives Épistolaires de Mari* I/1 [Paris, 1988], 453-482), Divination and the Scientific Spirit (pp. 125-137), The Substitute King and His Fate (pp. 138-155), The 'Code' of Hammurabi (pp. 156-184), 'Free Love' and Its Disadvantages (pp. 185-198), The Religious System (pp. 201-231), Intelligence and the Technical Function of Power: Enki/Ea (pp. 232-250), The *Dialogue of Pessimism* and Transcendence (pp. 251-267; with a new translation of the 'Dialogue of Pessimism' that departs from the one proposed by Lambert. Note for instance the phrase 'To wash one's hands [in preparation of dining, KvdT] makes the time pass' instead of the too literal rendering 'Šamaš accompanies washed hand'), and The Mythology of Death (pp. 268-286).

The juxtaposition of these fifteen essays produces an effect they do not have by themselves. Taken together, they give an insight into some of Bottéro's central ideas; the latter recur throughout these various essays. Instead of listing a catalogue of corrections and additions, it seems more profitable to discuss here two of these leading concepts. The one concerns the role of Mesopotamia as the cradle of Western civilization; the other is about divination being a science and, in a sense, the precursor of modern science.

One of the questions most frequently put to the Assyriologist by a lay audience concerns the use of his specialism. Why bother to do Assyriology at all? There seems little profit in the study of a dead civilization. Bottéro

addresses the question in a delightful essay entitled 'In Defense of A Useless Science.' The title is provocative, but slightly misleading. Having sung the praises of a discipline that puts a premium on knowledge leading to no material gain, Bottéro makes a turn about and insists that Mesopotamian civilization is of more than an antiquarian interest. By studying Mesopotamian history, so he argues, we are studying our own history. Our civilization is an offspring of Mesopotamia. We are short-sighted when we think of the Bible and the Greek Civilization as our main heritage. Beyond Jerusalem and Athens lies Babylon. Both the biblical and the classical worlds have been marked by Mesopotamia. Our history begins at Sumer. The Mesopotamian clay tablets, therefore, may be qualified as 'our oldest family documents' (p. 23). The same idea is put forth in the Introduction ('The Birth of the West', pp. 1-11) and an essay on Assyriology and Our History (pp. 26-40).

This *ad fontes* argument requires a note of caution. Bottéro writes that Assyriologists 'have never seriously tried to integrate the subject of their research into what concerns all of us: the history of our own past' (p. 27). This is hardly true. The beginning of the twentieth century saw the emergence of a current that came to be known as Panbabylonism; it owed that name precisely to the overriding concern to relate our cultural heritage to the Mesopotamian civilization. A book such as that of Hugo Winckler on the Babylonian civilization and its relations to the cultural development of mankind (*Die babylonische Geisteskultur in ihren Beziehungen zur Kulturentwicklung der Menschheit*), published in 1907, aims to make a case for Mesopotamia as the source of Western civilization. This episode goes unmentioned in Bottéro's survey of A Century of Assyriology (pp. 41-52). Considering the anti-Jewish edge of this early Assyriological current, most conspicuous in the works of Friedrich Delitzsch (*Babel und Bibel* [1902], *Die grosse Täuschung* [1921]), this silence is perhaps deserved. Yet in a far more subtle way, and without a hint of anti-semitism, Bottéro makes the same point Winckler did.

The fact that Bottéro's position is a sophisticated reprisal of an old tenet does not by itself amount to a disqualification. The weakness of the argument is not its lack of novelty, but its ethnocentricity and the tacit assumption that ancient cultures are important to us only when they can be connected with us as an earlier phase of our own development.

The ethnocentricity of the argument requires little comment. When Bottéro speaks of 'our' history, he addresses himself first of all to a French audience. In the English translation the audience encompasses the Western world. Yet in the age of the global village the argument smells of parochialism. Defended in terms of the Western heritage, the historical

relevance of Mesopotamia is real but limited. What is the use of Assyriology as a science for the modern world as a whole?

More serious than the ethnocentricity of the argument—one might say that Bottéro was addressing the issue of relevance not in general but for a specific audience—is the implicit view of the significance of past civilizations. Bottéro suggests that they are relevant insofar as they have contributed to the development of the civilization of the researcher. Their relevance is strictly historical. This notion is related to the view of history as an evolutionary process; the old gives way to the new and disappears: it has no value by itself, but only in its role as a preparatory stage. Such a vision of the past ignores the common ground between ‘them’ and ‘us’. Between past and present civilizations there is a continuity that is more than a mere historical connection; it is the same continuity as that between two contemporary civilizations that are very different from each other. This continuity is based on certain universals in humankind. Due to these universals we are able to at least approximately translate concepts of another culture in terms of our own. They are different, yet there is, at base, a community of needs and experiences between them and us. Therefore, paradoxically, by being different they teach us something about ourselves. They do so also when they are not our ancestors.

It follows from these considerations that Assyriology is not useful only when pursued as an historical discipline. It is as worthwhile—even more perhaps—when done as a branch of anthropology. What can be said in defense of Assyriology is much the same as can be said in defense of the study of the culture of the Nuer, the Dinka, and the Trobriand islanders. It is understandable that, for historical reasons, Mesopotamia tickles our curiosity more than some other civilisations do. This fact by itself, however, does not make it more worthy or important a subject for investigation. Any civilization of the past that is as richly and diachronically documented as the Mesopotamian would deserve as much interest.

Intimately related to the previous issue, yet to be distinguished from it, is Bottéro’s analysis of Mesopotamian divination as the precursor of Western science. Modern science, with its emphasis on empiricism and causal relationships, is often said to be the offspring of Greek science. In this view, the Greeks were the first to postulate nature as an autonomous realm the regularities of which could be systematically explored. Bottéro proposes a correction. Most forcefully in the essay on ‘Divination and the Scientific Spirit,’ but also in other parts of the book, Bottéro claims that ‘the invention of the scientific spirit’ was made first by the Mesopotamians (p. 137). This spirit is most clearly exhibited in the ‘science’ of divination.

Mesopotamian divination has come down to us in different collections of tablets, which may be qualified as 'treatises'. The style of these texts is monotonous. They consist of brief descriptions of events or situations (the omen), followed each time by an interpretation (the meaning of the omen, often couched as a prediction). Everything in the universe is potentially portentous: the occurrences of daily life, human behavior, the movement of the stars, the exta of sacrificial animals, and much more. According to Bottéro this divinatory lore is based, originally, on 'what we would call empiricism' (p. 132). Historical sequences were interpreted as causal relationships: *post hoc ergo propter hoc*. Early on, though, 'divination passed from its primitive state of simple empirical observation to that of knowledge a priori, to "deductive" knowledge' (p. 134). Omens were analyzed with the help of such hermeneutical tools as association (two finger-shaped outgrowths on the liver stand for rivalry between competitors for the throne), phonetic similarity (*pilšu*, perforations, in the liver refer to a future *pilšu*, breach, in the wall), and the doctrine of the right side as the *pars familiaris* and left as the *pars hostilis*. There was a system of interpretation (pp. 119-122, 130-134). Such deductive knowledge 'is already the essential element of science' (p. 134). In its systematization, divination eventually came to reject all empiricism; it attempted to study its subject 'in a certain sense *in abstracto*, which is also one of the characteristics of scientific knowledge' (p. 135).

In his interpretation of Mesopotamian divination Bottéro strikes a strangely familiar note. Is not this the same that Tylor and Frazer were arguing in connection with magic? Edward B. Tylor, in his *Primitive Culture* (1871), qualified magic as 'pseudo-science'. Magic, that occult science, was based on the Association of Ideas. 'Man, as yet in a low intellectual condition, having come to associate in thought those things which he found by experience to be connected in fact, proceeded erroneously to invert this action, and to conclude that association in thought must involve similar connexion in reality' (*Primitive Culture*, I, Chap. 4). This 'mistaking an ideal for a real connexion' is also characteristic of Mesopotamian divination, according to Bottéro. 'In our eyes such "connections" do not exist. They are pure coincidences without importance. We have to believe (and we know it from other sources as well) that such was not the case with the ancient Mesopotamians' (p. 133). Bottéro does not call divination a 'pseudo-science' (so Tylor) or a 'bastard science' (Frazer's term), but the implication is there.

It could be objected, perhaps, that Bottéro is dealing with divination, not magic. As a counter-argument, however, the objection is not strong. For Tylor and Frazer, divination is a province of magic. They operate

under the same 'laws.' Though Bottéro does not make the connection between divination and magic, his own writings on magic show that there is one. Take his long essay on magic written for the *Reallexikon der Assyriologie* (Vol. 7/3-4 [1988], 200-234, s.v. 'Magie'). Bottéro recognizes that there are 'laws' in magic: there is a certain solidarity between the elements. Magic works on the basis of analogy, contagion, phonetic association, and the like ('Magie', §§ 11-12.15). Are not these the same principles as those underlying the hermeneutical devices of divination? The intimate connection between magic and divination is illustrated, on a textual level, by the insertion of magical rituals to annul certain portents (called *namburbú*) in the treatises on divination (see, for instance, A.L. Oppenheim, *The Interpretation of Dreams* [Philadelphia, 1956], p. 300a). Therefore, if divination is a science, magic must be called a science, too.

Unwittingly, perhaps, Bottéro returns to the position of Tylor and Frazer. Their community of opinion is even more striking than it would appear at first sight. In his article on magic for the *Reallexikon*, Bottéro posits a chronological sequence in which magic precedes religion. First there was magic pure and simple; as it was permeated by religious notions, it became what Bottéro likes to call 'theurgy' ('Magie', 204a.207-208). Divination, too, was once free of religious concepts; soon it came to be viewed, however, as a religious discipline, and the portents were interpreted as a divine script. Since Mesopotamian divination is also the precursor of modern science, as Bottéro holds, it would seem that he is working with a tripartite sequence: magic, religion, science. The model is not as crudely presented as it was done by Frazer, but it is essentially the same. Bottéro is well aware of the overlap between the three realms, yet he maintains the idea of their historical succession.

If Bottéro adopts the idea of Tylor and Frazer, even in a slightly modified version, his views are open to the same criticism as theirs. A fundamental objection concerns the use of the terms. Magic, religion and science are notions that we impose on data from a culture that did not possess these categories. By so doing, one sins against the principle of *Eigenbegrifflichkeit* formulated by Landsberger ('Die Eigenbegrifflichkeit der babylonischen Welt,' *Islamica* 2 [1926], 355-372). It is not as though our categories do not correspond to anything in their world, but that they end up by producing a very distorted picture. The Mesopotamians did not make the same distinctions. Also the idea of 'science' (perhaps the only one of the three terms that has an Akkadian equivalent, viz. *mudûtu*), as we currently use it, is specific to our culture. It was developed in the 16th and 17th centuries and is associated with the notion of nature as an autonomous domain with fixed laws. Science is concerned with the

discovery of such laws. The knowledge it proposes is validated only by empirical testing. Such knowledge was not foreign to the Mesopotamians (they practiced agriculture, knew the art of glass making, and were masters of arithmetics), but it is not found in either magic or divination.

In reaction to the once popular view of magic as bad science, it is nowadays emphasized that magic is primarily a communicative and illocutionary performance (so Stanley J. Tambiah, "Form and Meaning of Magical Acts," in *Culture, Thought and Social Action* [Cambridge MA, 1985]; id., *Magic, Science, Religion, and the Scope of Rationality* [Cambridge, 1990], esp. Chap. 4). Like other rituals, 'magical' rituals celebrate and proclaim a situation. In a sense they bring it about, ushering the participants into that new situation. Yet they are not meant to produce something in a mechanical fashion. Rain rituals are performed in the rainy seasons; they anticipate the situation to come. Magic does have its techniques: they are the techniques of communication. The new reality they produce is a social reality, present first of all in the minds of the participants. The magical formula may be likened to the 'I will' of the wedding ceremony, or the verdict spoken by the judge: such words do create a new situation, not by interfering with the material world, but by imposing a perception of that world. Magic is a social construction of reality. It compares with publicity and propaganda, modern rites of society, not with science.

Something similar holds good for divination. Over against Bottéro it must be maintained that the presumed historical basis of divination is highly doubtful. The instances adduced by Bottéro to prove divination to be rooted in an empirical lore are unconvincing. The so-called 'historical' omens are themselves fine examples of speculation on the basis of assonance and analogy (see Jerrold Cooper, 'Apodotic Death and the Historicity of "Historical" Omens,' *Death in Mesopotamia* [ed. Bendt Alster; Copenhagen, 1980], 99-105). There does not seem to have been an empirical basis. Mesopotamian divination is based, not on empiricism, but on the conviction that the world is a symbolical universe, the elements of which refer to the unseen (gods, the future, things hidden in the past). The world is replete with meaning; the divinatory system explores those meanings. It is perfectly possible to call it a science, since it is a form of systematic knowledge. It is a knowledge, though, with a superior contempt for empirical testing. As non-empirical knowledge it compares to theology. However, science as we understand it must be based on empirically verifiable propositions. In this respect, theology is no science; nor is divination. It was not meant to be, either. The *bārû*, the professional diviner, may be called a scholar and an intellectual, but he was no scien-

tist. To present him as such, or as the precursor of the modern scientist, is misleading.

Is it then, after all, just a matter of words? Hardly so. Bottéro's endeavor to interpret Mesopotamian divination as proto-science is inscribed in his view of Mesopotamian civilization as the distant ancestor of the Western world. This emphasis on the historical role of Mesopotamia determines the angle from which it is approached. Both the differences and the similarities between them and us are measured with the yardstick of our concepts. Since scientific knowledge is generally regarded as one of the great goods of the modern Western world, it must be given a pedigree by finding its antecedents in Mesopotamia. The domain of divination is chosen to furnish those antecedents. Yet by this very procedure one loses sight of the differences in context. As a result the difference is interpreted as that between primitive and developed science, and, more generally, as that between a primitive and a developed people.

It would be unfair to end this review on a note of criticism. The foregoing remarks go to show the broad vision which Bottéro brings to his subject. It is also clear that I would prefer to put some accents differently. Yet this does not alter the fact that here we have the work of a great historian of culture and religion, full of insights and stimulating views. One could only ignore the book to one's own detriment. It is to be expected that this collection of essays will take its place among the 'classics' on Mesopotamian culture and religion. The possible debates which it may elicit will have to be considered a tribute to its author.

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## BOOK REVIEWS

ANANDITA N. BALSLEV and J.N. MOHANTY (Eds.), *Religion and Time*. (Studies in the History of Religions, NUMEN Bookseries vol. 54, ed. by H.G. Kippenberg and E.T. Lawson)-Leiden, New York, Köln: E.J. Brill 1993 (211 p.) ISBN 90 04 09583 7 (cloth) US\$ 63.00.

The editors explain that they were led to plan this book out of interest in the phenomenology of religion, which aims to explore the many modalities of religious consciousness, and out of the desire to foster inter-religious dialogue. In their introduction, they carefully distinguish between objective, subjective, and existential conceptions of time and, in doing so, remind the reader of the many difficult classical questions that stem from these conceptions.

Aside from the editors' introduction, this anthology is made up of two parts. The first of these contains an essay by James G. Hart on the religious significance of Husserl's phenomenology of time and an essay by Joan Stambaugh on Kierkegaard's and Heidegger's views of existential time, that is, time that belongs specifically to human beings, as against clock time and the time of the physicists. Kierkegaard focuses on the unfinished quality of human existence. Heidegger does not disagree but puts an overwhelming emphasis on the *there* that is openness to *being*.

The second part of the anthology, on time in particular religions, contains the following essays: "Time in Judaism," by P. Steensgard; "Time in Christianity," by Peter Manchester; "Time in Islam," by L.E. Goodman; "Time and the Hindu Experience," by Anandita Balslev; and "Time in Buddhism," by G.C. Pande.

The book does not make it easy to generalize on the subjects it deals with. On the contrary, a number of its essays make the point that we have been misled by familiar stereotypes. It is true, we are reminded, that Judaism emphasizes the uniqueness of historical events, but its cults, festivals, and rituals bear witness to belief in mythical and cyclical time. Islam, too, has an internal variety of conceptions of time, ranging from the "theologians' " atomism to the varying views of philosophers. It is no less misleading to characterize the many Hindu views of time in a single sweeping abstraction. And Buddhism, despite its emphasis on the minimal moment, causal process, and *nirvana*, proves far from uniform.

In the first of the essays on particular religions, Steensgard explores time in Judaism in its varied manifestations, mythical, cultic, and sacral,

historical, prophetic, eschatological, and apocalyptic, and medieval, modern, and contemporary. With respect to Christianity, Manchester sees time and Christian experience coming together in a distinctive view of revelation. He briefly studies the structure, intellectual content, historical origin, and uniqueness of "the foundational Christian experience of time" and ends by noting the problematic philosophical accomplishment of Hegel.

Goodman goes from the pre-Islamic poets and their censure and braving of time to the Quranic conception of time as "the precarious moral span of history suspended between judgment and creation." He explains how and why the practitioners of *kalam* understood being as absolutely dependent, untemporal, unextended, unconnected atoms sustained only (as in European Occasionalism) by God's power. The *mutakallimum* ("theologians") were at odds with the philosophers, heirs to the Neoplatonic and Aristotelian views of time, with all the distinctions and problems these views entailed. Goodman ends with an account of the positions of Maimonides and, especially, al-Ghazali, "the two most sophisticated defenders of the idea of an origin in time."

Writing of the Hindus, Balslev stresses the vastness of the Hindu consciousness of time and the Hindu play with various alternative conceptions: "The richness and the enormity of the material available for exploring the many-layered meaning that the theme of time has in this complex and highly articulate tradition, calls for a gigantic scholarly enterprise." Here, Balslev undertakes to examine and correct common clichés and to draw attention to the wide range of authentic traditional texts and sometimes radically different time-models.

In the last essay, Pande begins with the Buddhist adoption of the cosmic cycle and the ideas of *karman* and *samsara*. He recalls the early Buddhist division of questions into those that can be given a categorical answer following suitable analysis, those that can be answered after suitable cross-questioning the questioner and learning his real intention, and those to which there is no answer at all, at least no empirical or logical one, as the *Madhyamikas* emphasized. "In the spiritual vision of Buddha, time is encountered, not as the space-time in which physical bodies move, but as an aspect of subjective experience," which is composed of no more than a series of substanceless momentary states that succeed one another in accord with the law of dependent originating. Following a discussion of the contrasting views of the earlier Buddhist schools, Pande recalls the centuries of acute debate over the doctrine of momentariness among Buddhists and between Buddhists and Hindus. To the Buddhists, as he concludes, "freedom comes from disengagement from the Wheel of Time."

Each of the essays included in *Religion and Time* is well-constructed, well-informed, well aware of historical context, carefully shy of stereotypes, and richly informative. The book should do much to further its editors' goals.

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PAUL VAN LINDT, *The Names of Manichaean Mythological Figures. A Comparative Study on Terminology in the Coptic Sources*. (Studies in Oriental Religions 26)—Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz 1992 (XXVII + 247 p.) ISBN 3-447-03312-6 DM 138.00.

The study in Manichaeism as a world religion spread over three continents is confronted with sources in many different languages. So the purpose of the author is to collect the Coptic sources dealing with mythological figures and to make this material available to other scholars (IX). In addition the author wants to show important differences between the Psalm-Book, which he associates with Gnostic-Christian beliefs, and the Kephalaia, which are founded on Syriac texts in close relation with Mani's doctrine. After an introduction the author gives all the references of 31 mythological figures found in Coptic Manichaica (in Coptic), the context of each proof (in English) according to the order of the references, but we also find a division in the terminological variations of the concerned mythological figures. Reducing the great number of references he sums up the different writings (in Coptic) to keep an overview. Every chapter finishes with a commentary discussing the origin and the meaning of the different terms. A table of the names of the mythological figures and their origins shows the manifoldness of these names and their origins, and it gives impressive further arguments that Manichaeism cannot be seen as a Christian heresy, as some church fathers and some modern scholars did and do. Furthermore we learn something about the specific adaptation of Manichaeism in Egypt and about different groups within Coptic Manichaeism. The study closes with some hypothetical but substantial remarks as to the spread of Manichaeism in Egypt, which sees Palmyra as a starting point for the Manichaean mission to Egypt, and Alexandria and Lycopolis as main centers for the composition of the Psalm-Book and the Kephalaia respectively. Van Lindts study not only makes a part of Coptic Manichaean terminology available in an excellent way for non-

coptologists, but it also closes some gaps in knowledge of early history of Manichaeism and its literature. Concerning methodology it shows again that we cannot speak of "the" Manichaean religion, but only of the doctrine of one single text which we can try to supplement by other texts.

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SUSANNE KRONE, *Die altarabische Gottheit al-Lāt*. (Heidelberger Orientalistische Studien, Band 23)—Frankfurt a.M., Berlin, Bern, N.Y., Paris, Wien: Peter Lang 1992 (587 p.) ISBN 3-631-45092-3 DM 128.00.

Susanne Krone's substantial and comprehensive study of the Arab goddess Allāt originally was an Erlangen dissertation that has been rewritten for publication. It treats in eight extensively documented chapters all aspects of Allāt, her cult and character. Dr. Krone rightly considers Allāt an original Arab goddess, whose origin is not to be sought in Mesopotamia and who is not related to the Mesopotamian deity Allatu-Ereskigal (ch. 1). Her name and its etymology are discussed in ch. 2. The author sees the name al-Lāt as a contracted form of al-ilāt, the feminine of the common Semitic deity "Il" or "El" with a prefixed article. Ch. 3 deals with the different areas and places where the cult of Allāt is attested: the North-Arabic region, where she is mentioned in Thamudic, Lihyanitic and Safaitic inscriptions and graffiti, a few attestations in Phoenicia and Punic texts, in cities like Hatra, Palmyra, Edessa, Emesa, and Dura-Europos, and with the Nabataeans. The author also pays attention to the cult of Allāt during the 4th to the 7th century and records of her cult in Arab poetry from the pre-Islamic period and with Arab historians. The name of Allāt is widely attested in various theophorous proper names, which are discussed in ch. 4. Ch. 5 treats the iconography of Allāt, who originally a baetyl, was later represented as the Greek war-goddess Athena, or as Atargatis, the Syrian mother goddess, or as Nemesis, goddess of fate and vengeance. The iconography mirrors the goddess' character: she is essentially a deity with aggressive and erotic aspects, a characteristic combination with Semitic goddesses. In addition Allāt displays some traits of an astral deity, perhaps the moon (ch. 6). Ch. 7 describes the various temples and cult-places of Allāt that are preserved

and known and the cult proper, in which processions and sacrifices, oaths and cultic meals play an important role. The last chapter offers an elaborate and useful discussion of the other deities with whom Allāt sometimes appears together: Ruḏā, Allāh, al-ʿUzzā and Manāt. The book ends with a summary, an extensive bibliography, and some poorly reproduced plates, but it does not have an index.

This necessarily rather sketchy survey of this substantial monograph cannot do justice to its wealth of information and learned discussions of difficult problems in an area of research, where we only have inscriptions, archaeological remains and some iconographical representations, but not myths, descriptions of ritual procedures and other longer texts. On the basis of this limited material the author has succeeded in producing a balanced monograph on Allāt, which gives a convincing picture of the goddess and her cult in a principally Arab milieu. It is therefore an important contribution to the study of pre-Arab religions in the Near East in the centuries before and after the beginning of our era, when semi-nomadic Arab tribes settled in urban centres in and around the Syrian-Mesopotamian desert and assimilated with Greco-Roman culture and religion.

It is not amazing that some of the author's statements and interpretations are debatable and sometimes wrong. The enthroned goddess on the famous Nergal relief from Hatra is certainly not Allāt, but Atargatis (p. 37). The emperor Philippus Arabs was not a Christian, and an early appearance of Christianity at Palmyra based on the supposedly good relations between queen Zenobia and Paul of Samosata bishop of Antioch (p. 173) is very unlikely (cf. F. Millar, JRS 61, 1971, 1-17). The sun god Elagabal of Emesa was originally the god "mountain", solar aspects were secondary (cf. J. Starcky, *Stèle d'Elahagabal*, MUSJ 49, 1975-76, 503-520). For the iconography of Allāt as Atargatis (p. 313ff.) see my article: *Dea Syria*, LIMC, III, 355-358. For the famous lion orthostate from Allāt's temple in Palmyra see my article: *Sanctuaries and Social Safety. The Iconography of Divine Peace in Hellenistic Syria*, *Visible Religion* I, 1982, 65-75, in which the iconography is amply discussed. At p. 340 the author does not consider Allāt a *potnia theron* as I do. In this context it is not without importance that Allāt's sanctuary at Palmyra yielded a marble head of an Athena Giustiniani, which is Athena in her function of *potnia theron* especially of sheep and goat. The identification of Allāt with the Hatrene goddess Martēn is very dubious; Martēn is rather a moon goddess. The inscriptions in the central temple in Hatra record Allāt and Martēn as separate deities. Allāt moreover had her own temple inside the central complex opposite the temple of the Hatrene triad (p. 361). In

Palmyra Allât was not the paredros of Bêl, as Dr Krone writes (p. 369), referring to Du Mesnil du Buisson (cf. Seyrig, *La parèdre de Bêl à Palmyre*, Syria 37, 1960, 68-74). At p. 446 the author discusses the god Aršu at Palmyra. It ought to be mentioned that Aršu's temple at Palmyra was discovered already in 1980 at the north side of the wadi close to the agora (cf. CRAI 1985, 286-293). These are a few points among many others which call for discussion. They, however, do not diminish the value of this monograph, but only highlight its importance for this field of the history of religion.

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LIVIA KOHN, *Early Chinese Mysticism: Philosophy and Soteriology in the Taoist Tradition*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press 1992 (ix, 218 p.) ISBN 0 691 02065 3 (cloth) \$ 45.00; 0 691 02065 5 (paperback) \$ 14.95.

Philosophical Taoism is well known in academic circles, and its principal canonical texts, the *Lao Tzu* (or *Tao Te Ching* or *Classic of the Tao*) and the *Chuang Tzu* are frequently read in American religion and philosophy courses. Chinese religion, both ancient and modern, both classically recognized (e.g., Buddhism and religious Taoism) and popular, is increasingly understood to be a vibrant strain of Chinese culture and is a subject to be studied in comparative religion. In the popular American view, the *Tao* functions as a universal icon without specific content and onto which individual philosophical predilections can be projected, as attested by the growing number of *The Tao of ...* (*Pooh*, *Sex*, *Physics*, *Leadership*, and even *Islam*) books which crowd the catalogues of religious publishers. That there actually was a strong mystical movement within religious Taoism is often and misguidedly taken to lend to support to such portrayals, some of which are notably inaccurate and inappropriate. We have long needed a book which describes and analyzes Taoist mysticism for what it actually was: one of the world's mysticisms subject to the principles which seem to prevail among other mysticisms and certainly amenable to comparative analysis.

Livia Kohn's new book provides most of that needed accounting and is thus much to be welcomed. Concentrating on the formal, "higher", or literary Taoist tradition Kohn charts the development of ecstatic and intensive meditational practices as direct outgrowths of a combination of the two foundation texts and the transformation of Chinese mythology and shamanism into Taoist myths and mystical realization. Most helpfully, along the way, she outlines the relationship of Taoist mysticism to Buddhism and thereby clearly distinguishes the highly layered and sophisticated native analysis of approaching the sublimity of the transcendent which has sometimes been attributed entirely to the effect of the imported religion.

Kohn is at her best in explaining those whose work directly provided the basis of Chinese mysticism and describing that mysticism itself. It is the commentators on the canonical texts, such as Wang Bi (226-49), who describe the mystical Tao, "For Wang Bi, the Tao is not only the One. He also identifies it with original nonbeing and with the Great Ultimate: As such, the Tao is the clearly understood root and origin of the world." (61) There is not a great leap from this concept to the highly elaborated (and frequently successful) Taoist alchemical and medical tradition which has recently seen a long-needed revival. Kohn identifies the *Heshang gong* commentary (2nd-3rd cent. C.E.??) as the classical synthesis of this tradition: "Chinese traditional medicine defines the fundamental share all beings have in the Tao as their vital energy (*qi*). Everyone is endowed with this cosmic force ... the vital energy within the human body appears in definite forms. Represented as spiritual forces or body divinities (*shen*), it resides in certain energy centers, most commonly described as the five "intestines" or orbs. According to Heshang gong, nourishment of the five spirits is an essential prerequisite for attainment of the Tao." (67)

Kohn is particularly enlightening in her treatment of the long-lived Chinese tradition of leading religious specialists undertaking mystical explorations of fantastic other worlds in search of "immortal freedom as their ultimate goal" (96), familiar to most students of China only through the (?3rd cent. BCE) shamanic poetry collection *Ch'u Tzu* (*Songs of the South*). She links the escapist verse of the third to sixth centuries CE both to the plaintive wandering of the mythicized Ch'ü Yuan and to the surveys of powerful royal figures and regal-symbol dragons through outlining the ideology of the Great Man (*Daren*). Kohn carefully differentiates the Great Man of the extended shamanic-mystic tradition from the upright leading citizen called the same name in Confucianism. In this discussion Kohn demonstrated that in China, no less than anywhere else,

intellectual and symbolic development progress along the familiar path of iconographic consensus in the midst of fierce argument over what those icons are supposed to stand for.

Amongst the many virtues of this useful book, however, are certain gaps that one hopes may be filled in subsequently. Kohn leaves unclear the developmental relationship of the *Lao Tzu* and *Chuang Tzu* on the one hand and shamanic ecstatic practices on the other. Kohn notes that shamanism (including the custom of fantastic journeying) in China clearly preceded the two Taoist canonical works by centuries or millenia, and these texts include passages that must derive from Shamanic chants and yogic manuals. Were these shamanic practices the direct ancestor of the later mystical practices, and if so how did the transition take place? The evolutionary question of what led to what is left too much unanswered. Such uncertainty, especially regarding the *Lao Tzu*, causes other problems as well. For Kohn, the Tao of the *Lao Tzu* is "the organic order underlying and structuring the world." (p. 45) Alluding to the famous first lines of the canonical work, she continues, saying that the Tao "cannot be named or known, only intuited. It is unconscious and without name. It is organic in that it is not willful, but it is also order because it changes in predictable rhythms and orderly patterns. If one is to approach it, reason and the intellect have to be left behind." (p. 45) This interpretation casts the Tao as paradoxical which is present and sensed but ultimately not knowable because we are part of the economy of which it is the source. While different in characterization, this concept is of the same species as the Christian ultimate. The problem with this version of the Tao is that it fails to note that the Tao of the *Lao Tzu* is polyvalent. The uses of the term *Tao* in the *Lao Tzu* insist upon simultaneous multiple reference as the essence of the concept. The most sensible reading of the *Lao Tzu* is that the final redactor of that work abstracted from the earlier tradition a polyvalent object of interest as the only reasonable notion of the Tao which could logically incorporate the reflexes of such its shamanic heritage into a unified work.

Kohn's reading of the *Lao Tzu* is modulated by later sources, including the *Chuang Tzu*, (part of) which was written by a real person of that name, and especially of the commentators on the *Lao Tzu* such as Wang Bi. The absence of a definitive distinction between them yields a lack of attention to the fundamental question of how one proceeds from the highly abstract *Lao Tzu* to very concrete practices of religious Taoism and Taoist mysticism. The context of Chinese discourse (whether in the Confucian, Taoist, or Legalist tradition) inspires metaphysics that is based on ethics rather than epistemology, as in the West. The *Lao Tzu* is at least in part

a manual for the ethic of the leader elite. Kohn's exposition of the development of the Tao as that which is approached in mysticism would have been strengthened by accounting for this development.

By eliding over the singularity of the Tao of the *Lao Tzu*, Kohn ends up undercutting the theme which provides that part of her subtitle which concerns soteriology. From what are humans to be saved in Taoism? The notion of soteriology is alien to the *Lao Tzu* and, I believe, to the *Chuang Tzu* as well. When was salvation articulated as a concern, accepted, and why? By assuming an unbent thread linking the *Lao Tzu* with the flowering of mysticism, Kohn fails to treat these questions.

That is the weakness of Kohn's work, but on the mysticism which is the focus of her book, she is substantial and has made a most helpful contribution in giving us a treatment that should, for some time to come, form a solid basis for describing the indigenous mysticism of China. This book is an excellent introduction for those wishing to understand how mysticism in China took root and flourished and in its correlative activities in health and medicine has had so profound an influence on the world.

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ARMIN W. GEERTZ, *The Invention of Prophecy: Continuity and Meaning in Hopi Indian Religion*. Berkeley: University of California Press 1994 (xxi + 490 p.) ISBN 0-520-08181-1 (cloth) \$ 40.00.

Armin Geertz's *The Invention of Prophecy* is methodologically sophisticated, theoretically informed, and substantively significant. It represents a major achievement by a gifted scholar in comparative religion who has already established his competence, creativity and resourcefulness in his previous publications. This book presents an extended analysis and discussion of important features of Hopi Religion, especially prophecy, as well as relevant approaches to the study of religion. Because of this dual focus *The Invention of Prophecy* advances not only our knowledge of Hopi Religion, but also the debate about theory and method currently proceeding in comparative religion.

Methodologically, Geertz argues for an ethnohermeneutic approach. By this he means employing the interpretive and explanatory resources made available by the cognitive sciences generally and cognitive

anthropology specifically. By adopting such an approach he is able to focus not only upon the explicit knowledge found in texts and oral instruction but also upon the implicit knowledge that guides specific forms of religious behavior. His theoretical object, therefore, is cognitive and permits us to have access to quite complex modes of thought not readily available to surface descriptions of social facts. This does not mean that Geertz's theorizing ignores the socio-cultural. On the contrary his method permits him to make significant discoveries about social processes.

Substantively Geertz demonstrates that while Hopi prophecy is an indigenous cognitive category its power lies in its capacity to serve larger social and cultural purposes. In fact Hopi prophecy can most adequately be understood only against the background of specific political, social and historical factors. All of this means that we are dealing not with an unchanging essence but a creative phenomenon, a conceived tradition, which reflects both continuity and change. As such prophecy and the "tradition" from which it emerges is a creative resource available by its very flexibility for many purposes. Geertz is able to demonstrate that prophecy enables the Hopi to maintain a sense of ethnic identity, to establish forms of resistance against White society, to attract disenchanted movements in White society, and to provide a means for constructing a specific system of meaning and significance. It also permits Whites who suffer a crisis of identity to recreate for themselves a new vision of the earth and the possibilities of life. Prophecy is, therefore, a living social process not concerned with foretelling the future but with interpreting the present and interpreting and reinterpreting the past.

Geertz's book is filled with very specific and intriguing information about Hopi myth, ritual speech and songs, the specific roles that Hopi prophecy has played in Hopi history, the creative tension between Hopi "traditionalists" and the Tribal Council, the mutability of petroglyphs, and the role of "Hippie people" in the construction of meaning. It also presents an intriguing model of narrative tradition and change. It concludes with valuable appendices containing, among other things, a bilingual version of the Hopi emergence myth, as well as variations on this myth. Finally it has an excellent bibliography.

Scholars will welcome this magnificent contribution not only to our knowledge of Hopi religion but also to the scientific study of religion.

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NUMEN, Vol. 42 (1995)

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# DEMETER IN ROMAN CORINTH: LOCAL DEVELOPMENT IN A MEDITERRANEAN RELIGION\*

RICHARD E. DEMARIS

## *Summary*

This study constructs a history of Demeter worship in Corinth and its environs based on archaeological finds from the Demeter and Kore sanctuary on Acrocorinth and elsewhere in the Corinthia. These finds document the changing character of Demeter devotion from the Greek to Roman period. Demeter worship survived the Roman sacking of Corinth in 146 BCE, but the reemerging cult changed: Demeter's chthonic aspect became dominant in the Roman period. The earlier Greek emphasis on fertility, substantiated by votive pottery finds from the Classical and Hellenistic periods, gave way to funerary and underworld emphases. Evidence both from the Demeter and Kore sanctuary on Acrocorinth and from Isthmia attests to the growing importance of Persephone and Pluto, the rulers of the dead, and of snake symbols, whose funerary and chthonic affinities were deeply rooted in ancient Mediterranean culture.

This archaeologically based reconstruction of Demeter devotion in the Corinthia confirms the importance of local studies of religion and the need to qualify longstanding generalizations about Greek and Roman religion. In addition, this study provides context for, if not an explanation of, an unusual application of baptism among first-century Corinthian Christians. The Demeter cult's focus on the underworld in the Roman period appears not to have been unique in the Corinthia, for Corinthian Christianity exhibited a like concern in extending baptism to the dead (1 Corinthians 15:29).

## *Introduction*

The growing wealth of archaeological data from the ancient Mediterranean basin requires us to reexamine longstanding generalizations about the religions of the Greco-Roman world and to refine our statements about the religious climate of the ancient Mediterranean according to specific times and places. This necessity has begun to impress itself on colleagues in my field, the New Testament; particularly because in the last fifteen years the discipline has sought to make more precise and discriminating statements about the social and cultural contexts of individual New Testament documents and the communities that produced them.

Scholars in the other disciplines studying the ancient Mediterranean world are also moving in the same direction, methodologically speaking. The assistant director of the Corinth excavations, N. Bookidis, has recently made the following remark after her many years of work on the Demeter and Kore sanctuary on the slope of Acrocorinth: "As specialization has affected most aspects of ancient art and archaeology, so has it invaded the field of ancient religion.... The change has arisen from an increasing awareness of regional variations in ancient religion, which have made the generalizations of the past somewhat suspect".<sup>1</sup>

Scholarship that ignores regional variations has not altogether disappeared from New Testament scholarship or from the study of ancient religions. For instance, W. Willis's 1985 study of Paul's arguments concerning the Christian consumption of meat offered to idols at Corinth explored sacrifice, cultic meals, and associations in the Hellenistic world, but, surprisingly, Willis chose not to treat Corinthian cultic facilities, excluding from consideration even the numerous and very unusual dining rooms unearthed in the late 1960s and early 1970s at the Demeter sanctuary in Corinth.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, recent volumes of *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt* point to a move away from general studies about ancient Mediterranean religion toward studies that take full account of regional situations and local dynamics. For example, a 1990 volume on religion has the following articles: "Mithraism in Syria" and "Caesarea Palaestinae as a Religious Center", both by L.M. Hopfe; "Antioch on-the-Orontes as a Religious Center, I. Paganism before Constantine", by F.W. Norris; and "Les dieux de Palmyre", by M. Gawlikowski.<sup>3</sup>

#### *Corinthian Demeter Devotion in the Greek and Roman Eras*

Two studies on the Demeter cult appeared in a 1989 volume of *ANRW*: "The Eleusinian Mysteries in Roman Imperial Times", by L. Alderink; and "The Eleusinian Mysteries: Roman Initiates and Benefactors, Second Century B.C. to A.D. 267", by K. Clinton.<sup>4</sup> These studies call for a response, because Demeter of Corinth suffered a very different fate from Demeter of Eleusis: in contrast to the continuity Alderink and Clinton found between the Eleusi-

nian mysteries of the Greek and Roman periods,<sup>5</sup> the Greek and Roman phases of Demeter devotion at Corinth differed.

Differences might be expected, of course, because Rome dealt with Corinth and Eleusis very differently, but the contrast is not one of steady popularity at Eleusis and decline at Corinth. In fact, devotion to Demeter was so deeply rooted in the Corinthia that it survived the crisis of 146 BCE, when the Roman general Mummius sacked the city. The resulting disruption and depopulation of the area was not overcome for a century, until Julius Caesar founded a Roman colony at Corinth. Cultic activity at the Corinth sanctuary of Demeter, which had begun in the seventh century BCE and reached a peak in the sixth, fifth, and fourth centuries, dwindled to nothing in the mid-second century BCE. But worship must have revived significantly by the mid-first century CE, for a major rebuilding of the sanctuary took place in the second half of that century. The renewed cultic activity there continued until the late fourth century when use of the Roman sanctuary came to an end, brought about we presume by Alaric, earthquake, or militant Christians.<sup>6</sup> This short history of the Demeter and Kore site is evidence of relative continuity and steady popularity *even in the face of* overwhelming military and thus economic and political disruption.

The archaeological record points to a change in Demeter devotion from the Greek to Roman periods not in terms of waxing and waning popularity but in terms of the cult's religious orientation. One indication of this change is the architecture of the sanctuary on Acrocorinth which was altered dramatically in the Roman period. The numerous dining complexes, many with kitchen and bathing facilities, that had dominated the site in Classical Greek and Hellenistic times fell into disuse. Only one of these buildings saw reuse by the Roman Corinthians, but it was so extensively remodeled that even the tops of the dining couches lay under the earliest Roman floor.<sup>7</sup> The Corinthians of the Roman period reestablished the Demeter sanctuary farther up the slope of Acrocorinth. There they erected three small temples which constituted the new focal point of the site.<sup>8</sup>

Other archaeological finds also reflect a change. Miniature pottery, particularly water jugs and winnowing baskets, numerous in

the Greek period and clearly votive in function, disappeared; the Roman period left few remains of pottery with an obviously cultic purpose, with the exception of many large high-standed bowls with lids, used for incense.<sup>9</sup> What stood out among the Roman period finds were curse tablets (*defixiones*), which were concentrated at levels dating to an early phase of Roman occupation, probably late first or early second century.<sup>10</sup> While such curse tablets have been recovered from other sites connected with Demeter, they appeared at the Demeter site in Corinth only with the advent of Roman settlement.<sup>11</sup>

What do these material changes suggest about the Demeter cult in Corinth? If Demeter could be celebrated as the benevolent provider of fruits and sustainer of fertility, she could also be invoked because of her underworld aspect. The latter role evidently came to prominence in the Roman period.<sup>12</sup> A full treatment of the Corinthian sanctuary curse tablets has yet to appear in print because their poor condition has made them difficult to decipher, but it is known that they were addressed to the underworld gods, invoking their powers, in almost every case against women.<sup>13</sup>

The chthonic emphasis of the cult suggested by the curse tablets finds verification in the mosaic of the central temple, laid down in the late second or early third century CE. The mosaic depicts two baskets around which two large snakes are wrapped.<sup>14</sup> Given the snake's funerary and underworld affinities in Greco-Roman religion, what we have in the mosaic is iconographical confirmation of the Roman sanctuary's chthonic cast, an emphasis that is further confirmed by the dedicatory inscription on the mosaic. A certain Octavios Agathopous recorded the date of his benefaction as the year that Charis served as priestess of Neotera, an appellation the excavators of the Demeter sanctuary believe refers not to Demeter but to Kore or Persephone.<sup>15</sup> Thus, the central temple of the three that defined the Roman period sanctuary appears to have been dedicated to the queen of the underworld rather than Demeter.

Does this underworld emphasis go back to the very beginning of Roman Demeter devotion? Is it unique to this sanctuary or common to Demeter devotion in the region around Corinth, the Corinthia? The archaeological evidence suggests that this development was early and widespread. No Demeter sanctuary has been found

at nearby Isthmia, site of Panhellenic games and of the famous Temple of Poseidon, but chance finds west of the temple site document Demeter worship in the fourth century BCE. Both items of that date, a vase (skyphoid krater) and a statue of a girl, have inscribed Demeter dedications.<sup>16</sup>

The work of V. Anderson-Stojanović suggests a location for Demeter worship in the Isthmia area: the ridge spur known as the Rachi, immediately south of the Poseidon sanctuary.<sup>17</sup> Pottery finds from the Rachi, particularly the miniature water jugs and baskets that functioned as votives, typified Demeter worship.<sup>18</sup> Moreover, Anderson-Stojanović has been able to connect some of the figurines found on the Rachi with Demeter and Kore. While the figure of a young woman with polos (style of hat) and a young woman with dove may point to Demeter and Kore, they were also common types. The fragment of a torch, however, has less equivocal links to Demeter; the iconography of the cult regularly presented Demeter and Kore as torchbearers. On the basis of this evidence, Anderson-Stojanović has concluded that Demeter worship on the Rachi flourished from the sixth down to the fourth and maybe third centuries BCE, and that there may have been an as yet undiscovered shrine in the immediate area. A temple, however, is unlikely, as the slope of the Rachi is quite steep.

Demeter devotion at Isthmia continued or resumed in the Roman period. A certain Licinius Priscus Juventianus set up a dedication to himself, parts of which were found scattered between Isthmia and Corinth, narrating the various benefactions he bestowed on Isthmia. The inscription, dating between the late first and the late second century CE, describes a sacred grove or glen, whose location has eluded excavators.<sup>19</sup> The inscription refers to refurbishing temples in the glen, including those to Demeter and Kore, and it mentions construction of a Plutoneion, a sanctuary to Pluto, god of the underworld.<sup>20</sup> Worship of Pluto and sites dedicated to him are exceedingly rare in the Greek world.<sup>21</sup> To find evidence of such in the same precinct as the center for Demeter and Kore worship at Roman Isthmia suggests the underworld orientation of Demeter devotion there.

Roman ceramic finds at Isthmia also point to a Demeter devotion that has a decidedly underworld aspect. In the excavations of

1954 immediately to the west of the Poseidon Temple, head excavator O. Broneer and his team of archaeologists found a large open vessel (krater) with two snakes applied to its handles.<sup>22</sup> Closely related to this so-called snake vase is another, recovered in 1970 immediately east of the Poseidon sanctuary, in an area known as the East Field. From a long (11.0 meters), narrow (1.45 m) earthen tunnel in an area otherwise occupied by modest Roman houses of the second through fourth centuries came a vase fragment whose characteristics matched those of Broneer's find closely: (1) incised wavy line decoration (on shoulder or rim); (2) piecrust trim on rim's underside; and (3) a large snake appliqué.<sup>23</sup> Of the distinctive elements shared by these two vases the snake appliqué in particular points to an underworld or funerary aspect.<sup>24</sup>

Given that these vases point to chthonic or underworld ritual of some sort, what connects them with Demeter? The connection between these Isthmian vases and Demeter comes in the form of several pottery fragments with snake appliqué recovered at the Demeter and Kore sanctuary in Corinth. The Roman pottery specialist at that site, K. Slane, has documented three lid fragments with applied decorations, in all likelihood snakes.<sup>25</sup> Two other fragments, a neck and a handle, clearly have snake appliqué on them.<sup>26</sup> Thus, snake appliqué in the Corinthia signals not just a chthonic aspect in general; its tie to the Demeter sanctuary confirms the underworld orientation of that specific cult.

As for the dating of the Isthmian vases, we can again rely at least in part on pottery finds at the Demeter and Kore sanctuary. Such unusual vases—these are unknown elsewhere in Roman Greece—make determination of exact date or origin (domestic or import) difficult, especially as they are coarse ware rather than fine ware. Broneer found his snake vase with late Hellenistic lamps, so he went with that date, but the comparanda unearthed in subsequent years in the Corinthia makes a Roman date more likely. Broneer himself had been alerted to the discovery of a Roman high-standed bowl<sup>27</sup> found at the Demeter sanctuary in Corinth, a bowl with features—impressed wavy lines and a piecrust rim—strikingly like those of his find.<sup>28</sup> In addition to this bowl, fragments of at least eighty other vessels with applied flanges pinched to resemble piecrust have been recovered from the Demeter sanctuary.<sup>29</sup> Slane

has placed all these bowls between the middle and third quarter of the first century CE, during the earliest phase of the Roman Demeter sanctuary.<sup>30</sup> Accordingly, the Broneer snake vase is likely to date from this period as well. As for the other snake vase, the East Field piece, ample context pottery allowed excavators to date it to the third century CE.<sup>31</sup>

Common features between the early Roman cultic pottery of the Demeter and Kore sanctuary and the Isthmian snake vases allow us not only to date the Broneer snake vase to the first century but also to verify a chthonic emphasis in Demeter devotion dating back to the very beginning of its resurgence in Roman Corinth. This resurgent devotion was widespread and long-lived, for the snake vases taken together document a Demeter devotion in Isthmia that ran from the first to the third centuries.

### *Comparisons and Conclusions*

Given the proximity of Eleusis to Corinth, the scholar might expect numerous similarities between the history of Demeter in each place, yet the very different treatment Eleusis and Corinth received from Rome could have led to very different histories. In fact, the archaeological evidence as I understand it supports a more complex conclusion than essential similarity or difference. Demeter worship at Corinth survived hardships never faced at Eleusis, but the two histories of Demeter devotion are nonetheless similar: popularity at both sites in both the Greek and Roman periods. Yet, in contrast to Eleusis, the orientation of Demeter devotion changed in Corinth between those two eras: the earlier Greek emphasis on fertility gave way to funerary and underworld emphases. This combination of continuity and contrast between the histories of Demeter at two Greek sites underscores the complexity of religious traditions and the need for reassessing every general claim about Demeter in ancient Greece.

All broader studies of Demeter must rely on the history of local Demeter sanctuaries and shrines. The impact of many factors—military, political, economic, social, and religious—on local Demeter sites means that each has its own unique story. For instance, the history of Demeter at Cyrene followed a course that

differs from both that of Eleusis and Corinth. There, the religious orientation of Demeter devotion seems not to have changed from the Greek to Roman period; fertility and underworld emphases appeared in both. On the other hand, the cult seems to have evolved in terms of popularity: the archaeological evidence from the Greek period points to a high level of popularity at the lower levels of society, while in Roman times Demeter's popularity was limited to the few who could afford to commission inscribed statuettes made from costly imported marble.<sup>32</sup>

This diversity in local histories should not be seen as a disincentive to the task of composing a broader history of Demeter devotion. On the contrary, the archaeological record now emerging allows a fuller and more accurate history to be written. Nor does the complex history of each local site force the scholar to ignore larger, trans-local and trans-regional factors. Matching the evident continuity in Demeter devotion at Eleusis is the history of Demeter at Pergamum, where Roman period construction at the Demeter sanctuary points to elaboration rather than innovation. Construction of a nymphaeum in the sanctuary's forecourt, the rebuilding of the great altar and the stoa south of the temple in marble, and the addition of a columned entrance hall to the temple itself are evidence of the continuing popularity of Demeter during the empire but also of little or no interruption or reorientation of existing cultic activity.<sup>33</sup> What kept renovation and remodeling, even on a lavish scale, from engendering a significant change in the Demeter cult at Eleusis or Pergamum? Did Eleusis and Pergamum, unlike Corinth, have such established reputations as religious centers in the Greco-Roman world that innovation there was unthinkable? Did the Roman philhellenes who undertook the renovations and enhancements understand themselves strictly as conservators of an ancient religion? Motives often go unspoken, so we can only conclude that maintaining the status quo of such places was evidently in the best interests of their Roman benefactors.

Elsewhere, as the material record from the Corinthia indicates, profound change in the worship of Demeter did occur. Perhaps the strongest parallel to Corinth is Knossos, where Demeter devotion has been documented from the late eighth century BCE to the middle of the second century CE. J. Coldstream's study of the Demeter sanctuary notes that miniature votive pottery was central to cultic

activity at Knossos in the Greek period, as it was at other Dorian sanctuaries of Demeter.<sup>34</sup> Such pottery is abundant in the Corinthia, as I mentioned above, which is no surprise given its Dorian heritage. Unlike Corinth, Knossos was not sacked by Rome, but the arrival of Roman colonists from Campania in 36 BCE did signal a vigorous new stage in Demeter devotion there. Lamps and cooking pots replaced the miniature vases and figurines of the Greek period, a material change very much like what occurred at the Demeter sanctuary on Acrocorinth.<sup>35</sup> Roman colonists could, therefore, revitalize indigenous religions, but in doing so they could trigger profound changes in the practices and orientation of a local cult.<sup>36</sup>

As illuminating as the Knossos situation might be, however, it offers no insight into the growing chthonic emphasis of Demeter worship in Roman Corinthia. Accounting for this specific local development may be difficult, given the paucity of literary evidence from early Roman Corinth and the incomplete material record. Nonetheless, two observations deserve mention. If Roman colonists did play a significant role in the shaping of Demeter devotion in the Roman period, their social and economic background may shed light on the religious dynamics of early Roman Corinth. Current scholarship has concluded that the colonists that founded and built *Colonia Laus Julia Corinthiensis* were mostly former slaves sent as agents of Rome's ruling elite to establish Corinth as a major commercial and transshipment center for the empire.<sup>37</sup> Understandably then, the agricultural and fertility aspects of Demeter devotion did not receive the attention they might have if Rome had sent colonists primarily to exploit the rich soil of the Corinthian plain.

A second observation concerns burial practices in early Roman Corinth based on evidence from Corinth's North Cemetery. In that period—H. Palmer contends that the cemetery went out of use at the end of the first century<sup>38</sup>—we have evidence that Corinthians were practicing both cremation and inhumation. Palmer concludes that a residual Greek population inhuming their dead and Roman colonists cremating their dead were using the cemetery,<sup>39</sup> and this conclusion makes sense given the typical burial practice of Romans and Greeks in the first century.<sup>40</sup> This observation prompts the question of what, if any, impact this juxtaposition of practices had on the first-century Corinthians. Did differences in burials among

the Corinthians draw attention to the dead and thus to the underworld, so that local Demeter worship came to emphasize the chthonic?

This chthonic emphasis may have had a different genesis; perhaps several factors in the local environment played a role.<sup>41</sup> Whatever the case, there is some indication that this development in Corinthian Demeter devotion was not an isolated phenomenon. For decades biblical scholars have puzzled over the apostle Paul's mention of baptism on behalf of the dead, an early Christian practice that appears to have been unique to the Corinthian Christians (1 Corinthians 15:29). However the philologist reads the language of baptism on behalf of the dead (ὑπὲρ τῶν νεκρῶν), whether one takes ὑπὲρ spatially—over, above—or opts for one of its figurative senses—in defense of, in place of, in the name of, for the prosperity of—the practice itself expresses a concern for, or interest in, the dead.<sup>42</sup> A great majority of New Testament scholars understands baptism ὑπὲρ τῶν νεκρῶν as vicarious baptism for the physically dead, even if there exists no consensus about the origin and significance of the practice.<sup>43</sup> That baptism, the Christian rite symbolizing birth and the beginning of a new spiritual life, was extended to the dead may strike the interpreter of the New Testament as paradoxical, perhaps even contradictory. Yet, if the early church on Corinthian soil attracted Gentiles who were preoccupied with the dead and the realm of the dead, then this unusual application of baptism may have made perfect sense.<sup>44</sup>

If two religions that thrived in early Roman Corinth showed signs of responding to a local concern for the dead and the underworld, perhaps there were others. As more of the material record of the ancient Corinthia comes to light, scholars may be able to add to that list. Beyond that, the archaeological record may someday serve not only as the basis for describing Demeter religion in Roman Corinth but also for composing a comprehensive religious history of the Corinthia.

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<sup>1</sup> N. Bookidis, "The Sanctuary of Demeter and Kore: An Archaeological Approach to Ancient Religion", paper presented at the Archaeological Institute of America 1st Regional Symposium, Columbia, MO, 1987. See *American Journal of Archaeology* 91(1987) 480.

<sup>2</sup> W. Willis, *Idol Meat in Corinth: The Pauline Argument in 1 Corinthians 8 and 10* (Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series 68; Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1985) 5.

<sup>3</sup> *ANRW* (W. Haase and H. Temporini, eds.; New York: De Gruyter, 1990) II.18.4:2214-35 (Hopfe); 2380-411 (Hopfe); 2322-79 (Norris); 2605-58 (Gawlikowski).

<sup>4</sup> *ANRW* II.18.2:1457-98 (Alderink); 1499-1539 (Clinton).

<sup>5</sup> Alderink, "Eleusinian Mysteries in Roman Times", 1458-60; Clinton, "Eleusinian Mysteries: Roman Initiates", *passim*.

<sup>6</sup> N. Bookidis and R. Stroud, *Demeter and Persephone in Ancient Corinth* (Corinth Notes 2; Princeton, NJ: American School of Classical Studies at Athens, 1987) 9-12.

<sup>7</sup> Building KL:21-22 (Building T in early reports); N. Bookidis and J. Fisher, "The Sanctuary of Demeter and Kore on Acrocorinth, Preliminary Report IV: 1969-1970", *Hesperia* 41(1972) 299-304.

<sup>8</sup> Bookidis and Fisher, "Preliminary Report IV", 313; Bookidis and Stroud, *Demeter and Persephone*, 11, 22.

<sup>9</sup> K. Slane, *Corinth*, Vol. 18.2: *The Sanctuary of Demeter and Kore. The Roman Pottery and Lamps* (Princeton, NJ: American School of Classical Studies at Athens, 1990) 64; Bookidis and Stroud, *Demeter and Persephone*, 13-6.

<sup>10</sup> Bookidis and Stroud, *Demeter and Persephone*, 30; R. Stroud, "The Sanctuary of Demeter on Acrocorinth in the Roman Period", *The Corinthia in the Roman Period* (T. Gregory, ed.; Journal of Roman Archaeology, Supplementary Series 8; Ann Arbor, MI: Journal of Roman Archeology, 1993) 72.

<sup>11</sup> D. Jordan, "A Survey of Greek Defixiones. Not Included in the Special Corpora", *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies* 26(1985) 175-6.

<sup>12</sup> Bookidis and Fisher, "Preliminary Report IV", 304.

<sup>13</sup> Bookidis and Stroud, *Demeter and Persephone*, 30; Stroud, "Demeter on Acrocorinth", 72.

<sup>14</sup> N. Bookidis and J. Fisher, "The Sanctuary of Demeter and Kore on Acrocorinth, Preliminary Report V: 1971-1973", *Hesperia* 43(1974) 280-1.

<sup>15</sup> In conversation with N. Bookidis, Assistant Director, Corinth Excavations. Taking issue with this interpretation is K. Dunbabin, "'Ipsa deae vestigia...' Footprints Divine and Human on Graeco-Roman Monuments", *Journal of Roman Archaeology* 3(1990) 95. Stroud offers counterarguments in "Demeter on Acrocorinth", 73, esp. fn. 7.

<sup>16</sup> J. Caskey, "Objects from a Well at Isthmia", *Hesperia* 29(1960) 168; O. Broneer, "Excavations at Isthmia, Fourth Campaign, 1957-1958", *Hesperia* 28(1959) 323.

<sup>17</sup> V. Anderson-Stojanović, "Cult and Industry at Isthmia: A Shrine on the Rachi", paper presented at the Archaeological Institute of America 89th General Meeting, New York, 1987. See *American Journal of Archaeology* 92(1988) 268-9.

<sup>18</sup> Bookidis and Stroud, *Demeter and Persephone*, 13.

<sup>19</sup> *Inscriptiones Graecae* IV, 203.

<sup>20</sup> O. Broneer, "An Official Rescript from Corinth", *Hesperia* 8 (1939) 186-90; D. Geagan, "The Isthmian Dossier of P. Licinius Priscus Juventianus", *Hesperia* 58(1989) 350, 353.

<sup>21</sup> R. Garland, *The Greek Way of Death* (London: Duckworth, 1985) 53, 153; A.D. Nock, "The Cult of Heroes", *Essays on Religion and the Ancient World* (Z. Stewart, ed.; 2 vols.; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1972) 2:592.

<sup>22</sup> Inventory #IP 363; O. Broneer, *Isthmia*, Vol. 2: *Topography and Architecture* (Princeton, NJ: American School of Classical Studies at Athens, 1973) 29, pl. 14, c; O. Broneer, "Excavations At Isthmia, 1954", *Hesperia* 24(1955) 122, pl. 52, d.

<sup>23</sup> Inventory #IPR 70-80; J. Peppers, "Selected Roman Pottery, Isthmian Excavations, 1967-1972", (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 1979) 268-70.

<sup>24</sup> Garland, *Way of Death*, 158-9. For example, Attic funeral pottery (frequently amphorae) of the Late Geometric period (LGIIb, 720-700 BCE) commonly had plastic snakes on its rim, handles, and/or shoulders. See J. Coldstream, *Greek Geometric Pottery* (London: Methuen, 1968) 60, 79, pls. 11, g (Athens St. 222) and 14, e (Athens 17519).

<sup>25</sup> Slane's catalogue ## 152, 153, 154 (*Demeter and Kore Roman Pottery*, 68-71, pl. 9).

<sup>26</sup> Slane's catalogue ## 156, 157 (*Demeter and Kore Roman Pottery*, 71, pl. 9).

<sup>27</sup> Corinth excavation inventory #C-65-322.

<sup>28</sup> Broneer, *Topography and Architecture*, 29 fn. 28; N. Bookidis, "The Sanctuary of Demeter and Kore on Acrocorinth, Preliminary Report III, 1968", *Hesperia* 38(1969) 303, pl. 79, e.

<sup>29</sup> Slane, *Demeter and Kore Roman Pottery*, 66.

<sup>30</sup> Slane, *Demeter and Kore Roman Pottery*, 5.

<sup>31</sup> Peppers, "Roman Pottery, Isthmian", 269-71; P. Clement, "Isthmian Excavations", *Archaiologikon Deltion* 26(1971) 108.

<sup>32</sup> D. White, "Cyrene's Sanctuary of Demeter and Persephone: A Summary of a Decade of Excavation", *American Journal of Archaeology* 85(1981) 23-5.

<sup>33</sup> C.H. Bohtz, *Das Demeter-Heiligtum* (Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, Altertümer von Pergamum, 13; Berlin: De Gruyter, 1981) 15-16, 20-27, 45-53. Roman construction at Eleusis was much like that of Pergamum. See G.E. Mylonas, *Eleusis and the Eleusinian Mysteries* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1961) 155-81.

<sup>34</sup> J.N. Coldstream, *Knossos, the Sanctuary of Demeter* (Supplementary Vol. 8; Oxford: British School of Archaeology at Athens, 1973) 182-7.

<sup>35</sup> Coldstream, *Knossos*, 186; Stroud, "Demeter on Acrocorinth", 68-72.

<sup>36</sup> C.K. Williams, II, documents the complexity of the relationship between colonist and colonial religious environment in his survey of sacred architecture in and near the Roman forum of Corinth. See "The Refounding of Corinth: Some Roman Religious Attitudes", *Roman Architecture in the Greek World* (S. Macready

and F.H. Thompson, eds.; Occasional Papers [New Series] 10; London: Society of Antiquaries of London, 1987) 26-37.

<sup>37</sup> D. Engels, *Roman Corinth: An Alternative Model for the Classical City* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990) 16-8, 67; C.K. Williams, II, "Roman Corinth as a Commercial Center", *The Corinthia in the Roman Period* (T. Gregory, ed.; Journal of Roman Archaeology, Supplementary Series 8; Ann Arbor, MI: Journal of Roman Archaeology, 1993) 33, 46. J. Murphy-O'Connor has gathered and weighed the literary evidence bearing on the background of the colonists in *St. Paul's*

*Corinth: Texts and Archaeology* (Good News Studies 6; Wilmington, DE: Glazier, 1983) 51, 66, 107.

<sup>38</sup> C. Blegen, H. Palmer, and R. Young, *Corinth*, Vol. 13: *The North Cemetery* (Princeton, NJ: American School of Classical Studies at Athens, 1964) 167.

<sup>39</sup> Blegen, Palmer, and Young, *North Cemetery* 70-1.

<sup>40</sup> I. Morris, *Death-Ritual and Social Structure in Classical Antiquity* (Key Themes in Ancient History; Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1992) 52-3.

<sup>41</sup> The Roman colonists could have brought with them a Ceres devotion with a chthonic emphasis, an aspect of Italic religion explored by H. Le Bonniec, *Le Culte de Cérès à Rome: Des origines à la fin de la République* (Études et Commentaires 27; Paris: Klincksieck, 1958) 88-107, 165-84. Pausanias's description of Demeter worship in the nearby Argolid suggests strong chthonic tendencies (2.18.3; 2.35.4-11).

<sup>42</sup> H. Liddell and R. Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon* (9th rev. ed.; Oxford: Clarendon, 1940) 1857-8; H. Smyth, *Greek Grammar* (rev. ed.; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1956) #1697.

<sup>43</sup> G.R. Beasley-Murray, *Baptism in the New Testament* (London: Macmillan, 1962) 185-7; A.J.M. Wedderburn, *Baptism and Resurrection: Studies in Pauline Theology against Its Graeco-Roman Background* (Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 44; Tübingen: Mohr, 1987) 287-293, esp. 288; J. Downey, "1 Cor 15:29 and the Theology of Baptism", *Euntes Docete* 38(1985) 23; C.K. Barrett, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Harper's NT Commentaries; New York: Harper & Row, 1968) 363; H. Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians* (Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975) 275-6. B.M. Foschini, who takes issues with this interpretation, nevertheless admits it is the most common ("Those Who Are Baptized for the Dead" *I Cor. 15:29: An Exegetical Historical Dissertation* [Worcester, MA: Hefernan, 1951] 31). M. Rissi, whose study (*Die Taufe für die Toten: Ein Beitrag zur paulinischen Tauflehre* [Abhandlungen zur Theologie des Alten und Neuen Testaments 42; Zürich: Zwingli, 1962]) includes the latest and best survey of the existing interpretations (pp. 6-52), argues that vicarious baptism must be meant (pp. 52-92).

<sup>44</sup> The author's study of this practice will appear in a future issue of the *Journal of Biblical Literature*.

# THE JUDAISMS OF KAIFENG AND COCHIN: PARALLEL AND DIVERGENT STYLES OF RELIGIOUS ACCULTURATION\*

NATHAN KATZ

## *Summary*

This comparative study of the religious life of the Jewish communities of Kaifeng, China, and Cochin, India, contributes to our understanding the mechanisms by which a religion becomes acculturated into its environment. Borrowing the metaphor of foregrounding/backgrounding from Gestalt psychology, both the plasticity and tenacity of Judaism are emphasized.

A comparison of the Kaifeng and Cochin communities is warranted because both were small, secure and prosperous, located at the fringes of the Diaspora, and because both developed unique *minhagim* (local observances) which were influenced by their religious milieu, Confucian or Hindu. Unlike Jewish communities in Christian or Muslim environments, these communities were regarded with affection and esteem by their neighbors, who even bestowed gifts upon their synagogues, and these gifts from local kings were proudly displayed and became a part of Jewish folk traditions.

However, the patterns of religious acculturation of the Jews of Kaifeng and Cochin in important ways diverged. Whereas the Cochin Jews displayed either Judaically-appropriate or religiously-neutral gifts, such as a Torah crown or a charter of self-governance from the Maharaja, the Kaifeng Jews displayed incense burners used for ancestor worship, a gift from the Emperor, or banners proclaiming the essential identity of Judaism and Chinese religions. It is suggested that these divergences reflected the ultimate failure of the Kaifeng community, which assimilated itself out of existence, and the ultimate success of the Cochin community, which eventually immigrated en masse to Israel.

From the perspective of the discipline of religious studies, a comparative study of the religious life of the Jewish communities of Kaifeng, China, and Cochin, India, is particularly instructive. By examining these "exotic" Judaisms, we learn about the cultures in which they flourished, China and India, at the same time as we learn about the mechanisms by which a religion, in this case Judaism, becomes acculturated into its environment.<sup>1</sup>

Jewish religious life is governed by the ethical and ritual code known as *Halacha*. This code of law defined the requirements of traditional Jewish life: its dietary code (*kashrut*); system of family

purity (*taharat mishpacha*); the observance of Shabbat and Judaism's festivals, fasts and commemorations; the performance of rites of passage; and ethical and spiritual norms.

*Halacha*, however, is too generalized to provide explicit guidance in all matters of religious observance. Therefore, local customs (*minhag*, plural *minhagim*) evolved which enabled Jews to practice *Halacha* in the societies in which they lived. In other words, *minhag* is the way *Halacha* is observed according to local customs, and *minhagim* vary from place to place. *Halacha* is incomplete without *minhag*, which guides many Jewish observances—especially the life-cycle rituals. *Halacha* provides the framework, but one would be unable to celebrate a *brit milah* (circumcision ritual), a *bar mitzvah* (the celebration of a male child's religious coming of age), a wedding, or a funeral, unless one relied upon local *minhagim*.<sup>2</sup> To put this point in a more traditional metaphor, *Halacha* as Oral Torah is God's imperative, and *minhagim* are creative, human responses to that imperative.

In addition to providing the details of Jewish observance and tradition, *minhagim* were especially important in the acculturation of Judaism into the cultures in which it has been found. So long as *halachic* principles were not breached, Jewish communities adapted local customs, whether Hindu, Confucian, Muslim or Christian in origin, into their *minhagim*.

As Jewish religious acculturation was manifested in ritual practice through *minhagim*, so Jewish religious thought was influenced as well. How the Jews understood their religion and, perhaps more important for our discussion of the Judaisms of Kaifeng and Cochin, how they understood Judaism's relation to other religions—the dominant, host religion in particular—was another essential aspect of Judaic acculturation.

The purpose of this paper is to examine how Judaism became acculturated into Hindu and Confucian societies; or, how the Judaisms of Kaifeng and Cochin differed and how they were similar. To do so, we will explore both some of the practices and the religious ideas of the Kaifeng and the Cochin Jews.

The contribution to theoretical issues in the study of religions this paper hopes to make are in the domain of religious acculturation. Judaism in particular, but any religious tradition, is a complex

organism—so much so that some contemporary scholars prefer to analyze traditions in the plural rather than the singular: this paper defines its subject as “the Judaisms of Kaifeng and Cochin”, for example, and not “Judaism in Kaifeng and Cochin”. Within the richly diverse symbolic, ritual and ideational complexes which comprise Judaism are found such clusters of images as the priestly, prophetic, communalistic, ethical, ascetical, philosophical and regal. Depending on the values of the culture in which Judaism finds itself, and whether or not that host culture was hostile to Judaism, certain of the clusters rise to the foreground, to borrow the metaphor from Gestalt psychology, and others recede to the background. By examining the foreground/background configurations of the Judaisms of Kaifeng and Cochin, we see reflected Confucian and Hindu sensibilities.

Just as the prophetic-ethical threads from Judaism’s religious tapestry became foregrounded in Protestant America, so the priestly and regal threads were emphasized in Cochin, and those threads most resonant with Confucian values—familial including ancestral piety, the idealization of the life of the scholar, and civic loyalty—were evident in Kaifeng. It is proposed that this foreground/background reconfiguring of a religious tradition (or, how these configurations establish Judaisms in different host cultures) is a useful tool for understanding the complex process of religious acculturation.

### *The Data*

Unfortunately, the data from Kaifeng and Cochin are very much asymmetrical. That is, there remains a Jewish community in Cochin, albeit an attenuated one. As recently as 1986/87, one could observe the full cycle of annual Jewish observances there, and life-cycle rituals were fresh in memory. The rich folklore of the community is still alive, and Cochini elders can still be consulted, and many of their *minhagim* have made the transition into an Israeli context.<sup>3</sup>

Not so in Kaifeng, where the Jewish community ceased functioning a century and a half ago, and was said to have been in precipitous decline as long as four centuries ago.<sup>4</sup> Despite the (often

ill-informed) observations of Christian missionaries and the scholarship of Donald D. Leslie, many Kaifeng *minhagim* are obscure and many more forgotten—and there is no one to whom to turn for edification.

For this reason, comparisons are difficult and must be tentative. In sum, we are comparing the living tradition of Cochin with the extinct Judaism of Kaifeng. In one case we can observe rituals first hand, but in the other we have to rely upon speculative reconstructions of what communal life might have been like. Cochin's ritual and liturgical texts are still regularly enacted, but little of Kaifeng's literature remains—although some of its steles (stone tablets) are suggestive of what the religious life of the community must have been.

Despite these huge variations in the quality of our data, there remains a compelling rationale for comparing the Judaisms of these two most distant outposts of the Diaspora. In both Confucian and Hindu culture, Jews were welcome guests who practiced their religion in freedom. Nevertheless, the Jews of Kaifeng ceased to exist as a community more than a century and a half ago, and the Jews of Cochin abandoned their beloved homeland three decades ago. Yet even their demises differed. Kaifeng's community assimilated itself out of existence, while the Jews of Cochin made mass *aliyah* (immigration to Israel) and to some extent maintain their identity as an *edah* (ethnic group) in Israel today.

### *Origins, Welcomes and Displayed Gifts*

The Jews of Cochin and Kaifeng were similar on three counts with which we begin our analysis. They claimed an ancient origin in their homeland, each during the first century CE. They tell of being welcomed by local kings who gave them land to construct their synagogue and encouraged them to practice their religion. And in their synagogues they prominently displayed gifts from local royalty.

Elite groups in both India and China claim an external origin and longstanding residence in their adopted homes; this is the case in both the brahmin castes' claim to extrinsic, "Aryan" origin, and the foreign dynasties which ruled from Beijing. Over the centuries,

it became a matter of course for non-indigenous communities to claim an ancient entry into their new countries.

This pattern was especially pronounced in India, modeled after both the royal and priestly elites. Modelling themselves after the brahmins and the maharajas, Jews, Christians, and Muslims spatially and temporally located their migration into India from their holy lands during their sacred times.

The oldest Christian community in India, the Nazaranees Mapillas of Kerala, trace their origin to the Apostle Thomas, whose arrival at Cranganore, then capital of Kerala, they place in the year 52. Moreover, the textual authority for this claim, *The Acts of Thomas*, has Thomas in Jerusalem receiving Jesus' commission for his mission. The events described in *The Acts of Thomas* were relocated explicitly into Kerala by Maliekel Thoma Rambam in the 1601 Malayalam epic poem, *Thoma Parvam*.<sup>5</sup> Linked together in this legend are sacred time (the era of the Christ), sacred space (Jerusalem), extrinsic origin, and longstanding residency in India (nearly two thousand years).

These four key elements are also found in the origin legend of Kerala's Muslim community, as recorded in the sixteenth-century Arabic historical work, *Tohfut-ul-Mujahideen*, by the Kerala Muslim, Shaikh al-Malbari Zain al-Din.<sup>6</sup> Al-Din's narrative locates the origin of Kerala Islam in eighth-century Makkah, Arabia, when a trio of pious pilgrims set out for Adam's Peak in Sri Lanka, stopping in Cranganore en route. Contemporary local Muslims go one better: the Cheraman Juma Masjid, named for Cranganore's dynastic rulers, bears a sign which proudly proclaims it to be the oldest mosque in India, having been established in 621. This would date the mosque from the lifetime of the Prophet himself, thus connecting Kerala's community directly with Muslim sacred time, in accord with local legend.

Very similarly, the Cochin Jews narrate an origin legend which connects them not only with sacred space, Jerusalem, but also with sacred time, the era of the Second Temple.<sup>7</sup> Their claim is that they came to Cranganore in the year 70, fleeing the Roman occupation of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Temple.<sup>8</sup> Their claim is graphically asserted: in the Cochin Synagogue hang paintings which depict the Temple in flames and Jews setting sail for India.<sup>9</sup>

All three legends go a step further in narrating a most hospitable welcome from the Cheraman dynastic maharaja of Cranganore.<sup>10</sup> Several popular Malayalam-language wedding songs have the Indo-Bactrian king Gundaphorus sending for Thomas, a carpenter, to build him a temple as grand as Solomon's. Local traditions claim Gundaphorus to have been a Cheraman maharaja. Like the Muslims and the Jews, the Christians' narrative continues with a royal welcome from "Cheraman Perumal" and the bestowal of a copper plate inscribed land grant, bestowing upon them sovereignty at Mahadevapattanam, 'the city of the great god', in Cranganore, and rights to the 72 traditional privileges of royalty.

The welcome claimed by the Muslims is even more grand. According to their traditions, the king secretly accompanied the three pilgrims back to Makkah where he converted to Islam.<sup>11</sup> Interestingly, this apostasy is corroborated in local Hindu legends: the quasi-historical Malayalam text, the *Keralolpatti*,<sup>12</sup> records the conversion to Islam of the last Cheraman Perumal king who left for Makkah and thereafter became known as "makkattupoya perumal", the emperor who went to Makkah.<sup>13</sup> As ritual recompense for this familial apostasy, the maharajas of Travancore used to recite, on receiving their sword of office at their coronation: "I will keep this sword until the uncle who has gone to Mecca [Makkah] returns".<sup>14</sup> In this tradition of royal welcome and patronage, there is a stone inscription at the Muccanti Masjid of Calicut according to which a thirteenth-century Zamorin granted an income for the maintenance of the mosque.<sup>15</sup>

One of the most prized possessions of the Cochin Jews are two inscribed copper plates, kept in the synagogue's *aron hakodesh* (holy ark). According to the Cochin Jews' narrative, the plates were given to the leader of the Jews, Joseph Rabban, by "King Cheramanperumal" (a dynastic name; the individual monarch was Bhaskara Ravi Varman) in 379 CE (most modern scholars date the plates from the beginning of the eleventh century). Local traditions hold that the plates chartered an independent Jewish principality at Anjuvannam, believed to have been a section of Cranganore, known to the Jews as Shingly. Sovereignty was symbolized by privileges granted to Rabban, including such aristocratic symbols as the use of a parasol and an elephant, the sounding of a trumpet

salute, and the commercial prerogative to levy duties and tolls.

Folk songs and wedding rites underscore the importance for future generations of this archetypal relationship between King Bhaskara Ravi Varman and Joseph Rabban. When various circumstances forced the Jews to flee Cranganore and re-establish themselves at Cochin, the local maharaja similarly welcomed the Jews, granting them a plot of land to build their synagogue and residences, adjacent to his palace and temple. This patron/advisor relationship between Hindu maharajas and Jewish leaders remained essentially unaltered until 1947, when the Princely State of Cochin was amalgamated into the Republic of India.

Like the Jews of Cochin, the origin of the Jews of Kaifeng is obscure. The presence of Judeo-Persian words in Kaifeng chronicles led some early writers to conclude a Persian origin for the community,<sup>16</sup> but it demonstrates not Persian origin so much as Persian influence.

The 1663 stele from the Kaifeng Synagogue offers the community's own tradition regarding its origin: "The religion started in T'ien-chu ('India'), and was first transmitted to China during the Chou. A tz'u ('ancestral hall ') was built in Ta-liang (i.e. Kaifeng). Through the Han, T'ang, Sung, Ming, and up till now, it has undergone many vicissitudes".<sup>17</sup> The Chou Dynasty corresponds roughly to the first millennium BCE, an antique origin indeed. The inscription is also not clear as to the meaning of T'ien-chu, which usually means India but could be any country to the west of China,<sup>18</sup> possibly Persia or even ancient Israel. Most indigenous traditions date their origin to the Han Dynasty (206 BCE-211 CE), as noted by Perlmann:<sup>19</sup> "The Jews themselves, as far as their traditions go, asseverate that their ancestors immigrated to China at the time of the Han Dynasty, i.e., towards the end of the reign of Ming-ti of the East-Han Dynasty, which lasted from 25 to 75 CE. The Emperor reigned from 58 to 75 CE and is renowned for having introduced Buddhism into China".

The best assessment of modern scholarship is Leslie's:

It seems legitimate to assume that some Jews, coming via, if not from India, settled in the Chinese ports, and that some of these spread inland. There can also be little doubt that others came in via, if not from Afghanistan, and spread to Ningsia and Peking... The inscriptions, incidentally, give no hint

that they might have come to Kaifeng from anywhere else in China. On the contrary, they imply that the community arrived directly in Kaifeng from a foreign country.<sup>20</sup>

Whenever and from wherever they came to Kaifeng, the Jews took pride in being welcomed by the emperor, much as did the Cochin Jews. The 1489 stele from the Kaifeng Synagogue reads:

Indceed, the transmission and handing on of the Way of the Religion has an origin. It came from T'ien-chu 'India'; in obedience to the (divine?) command it came. There were Li, An, Ai, Kao, Mu, Chao, Chin, Chou, Chang, Shih, Huang, Li, Nieh, Chin, Chang, Tso, Pai, 17 surnames (hsing) in all. They brought western cloth as tribute to the Sung. The Emperor said: Come to our China, honour and preserve the customs of your ancestors, remain and hand them down in Pien-liang.<sup>21</sup>

Besides admonishing the Jews to practice their religion faithfully, the emperor gave the community through Yen-Tcheng, a Jewish physician, "... a present of incense and permission to repair the synagogue. Then was received the grand tablet of the Ming dynasty to be placed in the synagogue. The emperor bestowed honours and titles upon Yen-Tcheng".<sup>22</sup>

The tablet was, of course, displayed in the synagogue as a mark of the emperor's favor. As in the Cochin Synagogue, in the Kaifeng Synagogue were displayed a variety of gifts from their non-Jewish neighbors. But there the similarity ends. In Cochin, with the exception of the copper plates all donated objects were Jewish ritual implements; in Kaifeng, to the contrary, the gifts were essentially Chinese, not Jewish, and in a generous, humanistic spirit symbolized the similarities between Confucian and Judaic beliefs and practices. Overall, they had the unintended consequence of undermining Judaic distinctiveness.

The most prized Gentile gift in the Cochin Synagogue are the copper plates, neither Hindu nor Jewish but establishing the relationship that was to ensue between Hindu maharajas and Jewish subjects until 1947. Memorialized in folk songs are gifts of land, usually the land upon which Kerala's synagogues were built. Most intriguing is one of the *keterim* (Torah crowns) in the Cochin Synagogue. Made of 22-carat gold and studded with sapphires, rubies and emeralds, it was donated to the synagogue by the Hindu Maharaja of Travancore in 1803. And so it goes: in most of Kerala's synagogues is a list of donations for its construction or

refurbishing. And prominent among the donors are Hindu nobility, as well as an occasional Christian, Muslim or Jain.

The point to note is that in Kerala, Gentile gifts to the synagogues were synagogal items. Not so in Kaifeng. In the synagogue courtyards were a number of steles erected by Confucian officials. Rev. Finn was entirely correct when he wrote that:<sup>23</sup> “[T]he tablets erected by Gentile neighbors in their very synagogue, open to the world, and challenging contradiction, bear witness to the esteem which this community in general had maintained, and the honors to which members of it have arrived in various pursuits of life”. Senior Confucian officials also donated horizontal inscriptions which were displayed in the synagogue itself.<sup>24</sup>

In displaying these steles and inscriptions, the Kaifeng Jews displayed the honor and esteem in which their neighbors held them, just as did the Cochin Jews. But what was written upon these steles casts them in a different light, from a Judaic point of view. For example, the 1663 stele, erected by a Mandarin minister of state, read in part: “They scarcely differ from us in the worship of heaven, in the duties of civil life, or in honouring the dead”.<sup>25</sup> This generous spirit of the Confucian minister which elevated Judaism to a level of his own Confucianism, betrayed a syncretism, an unconscious blending of Jewish and Chinese values and precepts, which came to be adopted by the Jews themselves and which played a role in their ultimate assimilation.

It was not the steles and inscriptions which were most striking about the Kaifeng Synagogue, however; it was the presence of censers and incense before “ancestor shrines” which more than any single factor defined the *minhag* of the Kaifeng community. Not coincidentally, the incense and censers were donated to the synagogue by an emperor of the Ming dynasty (1368-1644).<sup>26</sup> We shall return to the issue of “ancestor worship”; for the present the point to note is the similarity and the difference in the display of items donated by Gentiles in the Cochin and Kaifeng synagogues.

Whether from the Han or Sung (960-1279 CE) eras, it is noteworthy that the Kaifeng Jews, like the Cochin Jews, claimed ancient origins. When confronting indigenous histories of this sort “Not only are the data scattered, equivocal, and all too often poorly

presented; but the mode of interpreting them, a matter largely in the hands of philologists, has been ... sociologically unrealistic in the extreme ... [These accounts] have led to a picture ... which, though not without its elements of plausibility, perhaps even truth, has about it the unmistakable air of fantasy systematized which derives from attempting to know what one has no way of knowing".<sup>27</sup> But therein lies the power of these legends; like all aspects of religion, that power "derives from attempting to know what one has no way of knowing". These narratives from Cochin and Kaifeng, in order to be understood, need to be interpreted not as knowledge itself, but as a cognitive framework which organizes, which is to say (without denying or affirming their factuality) they are truly myths. And it is for this reason that origin and welcome legends form essential components in the religious life of the Jews of Cochin and of Kaifeng, why such legends are part and parcel of any Judaism.

#### *Ancestor Worship vs. Enactions of Purity and Nobility*

Perhaps there is no more dynamic mechanism for Jewish acculturation than embellishments to a community's traditions of religious observance, or *minhagim*. The central ritual strategies for adaptation to life in China and India were ancestor worship in the first case, and the ritual enactments of purity and nobility in the other.

As we wrote about Cochin Judaism's acculturation to its Hindu context:

Among the most distinctive features of Indian civilization are two separate sources of power, of social prestige and position ... the priestly-ascetic and the noble ... In their *minhagim* the Cochin Jews have foregrounded the symbols of purity and nobility inherent in Judaism at the same time as they have adapted some of the priestly and royal symbols of Hinduism, making for one of the most exotic systems of Jewish observance found anywhere in the Diaspora. On the one hand, they have appropriated certain Brahmanical symbols of purity in their unique Passover observances. On the other hand, they have adapted aspects of the Nayar's [Kerala's nobility] symbols of royalty and prosperity in their unique Simchat Torah observances as well as in their marriage customs. Moreover, they managed this syncretism judiciously so as not to contravene *halacha*.<sup>28</sup>

Passover is known among secularized Jews for its ritual meal, the

Seder, and for family get-togethers. But among the observant, it has a distinctly ascetical flavor. Preparations for the festival—the systematic, ritualized removing of all usual foods for the household, the arduous “spring cleaning” and the expensive substitution and/or difficult preparation of special foods—are difficult at best. The restrictions which Passover imposes—avoiding grain products and eating dry, flavorless matzah; avoiding almost all social contact with non-Jews—adds an unmistakable asceticism which is reinforced by complaints, jokes and annually-repeated discussions of pertinent laws and statutes. In Cochin all of these ascetical elements of Passover are retained, some are exaggerated, and yet other restrictions are added. This practice of Jews to layer restriction upon restriction, religious duty upon religious duty, is known as the “additional observances”, *hiddur mitzvot* which “express the Jews’ love of the *mitzvot* by embellishing them”.<sup>29</sup> We have detailed these Passover observances elsewhere;<sup>30</sup> the point to note is that by foregrounding Passover’s inherent ascetical threads, the Cochin Jews approximated the status-generating ascetical lifestyle of the Brahmin hereditary priests. This was one of the key strategies by which Cochin Judaism became acculturated into its contexts without jeopardizing its *halachic* integrity.

As for the second pole of Indian civilization, that of the maharajas and the nobility, Cochin Judaism foregrounded its “... other resources comparable to the noble-kingly symbols of the Nayers, including: (1) the royalty symbolism (*malchut*) of the High Holy Days; (2) the resemblances between the Torah processions (*haqafot* or *rodeamentos*) of Simchat Torah and Hinduism’s deity processions; and (3) the royalty symbolism traditionally ascribed to brides and bridegrooms”.<sup>31</sup>

Most significant is the distinctive manner of observing Simchat Torah in the Cochin *minhag*. As we wrote: “Three aspects of the Cochin *minhagim* for Simchat Torah are creative responses to their Hindu environment in Kerala: the displaying of Torah scrolls on a temporary ark, the addition of afternoon *haqafot* outside of the synagogue building, and the ritual dismantling of the ark. Specifically Hinduized symbols of royalty and nobility have been appropriated”.<sup>32</sup>

For this festival, not only is the Cochin Synagogue magnificently

decorated with silks and satins and bedecked with strands of jasmine, but a temporary ark, covered with rich Benarsi brocades, is constructed in front of the *aron hakodesh*, and the synagogue's seven Torah scrolls are displayed on it. This practice reflects the annual (or periodic) removal of a Hindu temple's deity from the *sanctum sanctorum* and its public display on a cart. The addition of, and emphasis placed upon, three *haqafot* during afternoon prayers—striking because this is done nowhere else in the Jewish world—reflects the riotous deity processions of Hindu temples. Finally, the ritualized dismantling of the temporary ark reflects the Hindu practice of disposing of the deity in a body of water, often quite unceremoniously.

It is important to appreciate that in Cochin Judaism, these “compromises” with Hinduism were not compromises at all. All that was required for their religious acculturation was “an exaggeration of ritual themes inherent in Judaism, not the adoption of alien symbols”.<sup>33</sup>

One wishes it were possible to analyze the ritual behavior of the Kaifeng community in as much detail as has been done with the case of Cochin. But it is not; the Kaifeng community has been in decline for four centuries, if we can take Ai Tien at his word, and a full cycle of Jewish observances has not been enacted in more than two centuries. Instead of the direct participant-observation possible in Cochin, in Kaifeng we have the often distorted perceptions of missionaries, indirect evidence and attenuated memories.

Nevertheless, if the accounts available to us are accurate at all, the most striking aspect of Kaifeng's *minhag* is ancestor worship. Our question is whether this practice compromised Kaifeng Judaism's *halachic* integrity, or whether it was as judicious an acculturation as was the enactment of the symbols of purity and nobility were in Cochin Judaism, which was unproblematic from an *halachic* standpoint. To put the question more pointedly: did ancestor worship (if that is the right term for the Confucian practice) reflect and model assimilation rather than acculturation? Was ancestor worship a metaphor for the ultimate demise of Kaifeng Judaism?

The Jesuit missionary Jean-Paul Gozani, who lived in Kaifeng between 1698 and 1718, noted the role of the ancestors in Kaifeng Judaism, when he wrote in 1704:

At our going out of the synagogue is a great hall, which I had the curiosity to look into. I saw nothing in it except a great number of incense bowls. They told me this was the place where they honoured their holy men (*shengjen*) or great men of their Law. The largest of these incense bowls, which is for the Patriarch Abraham, stands in the middle of the hall. After this stand those of Isaac, of Jacob, of his twelve children, called by them the Twelve Descents or Tribes of Israel. Next are those of Moses, Aaron, Joshua, Ezra, and of several illustrious persons both men and women.<sup>34</sup>

Based upon his studies of Jesuit records, the nineteenth-century British missionary and diplomat, the Rev. James Finn, was also intrigued by the role of ancestors in Kaifeng Judaism:

In the matter of venerating the dead, it is still uncertain whether or not the Chinese carry it to the extent of adoration; but, like them, the Israelites in that country burn lamps before the names of their ancestors; and the sacrifices of incense, accompanied by the former at the parental graves at certain recurring periods, are nearly paralleled even among Jews in Europe and Palestine, when they visit the burial-places upon the Day of Atonement, reciting the names of departed friends or relatives, and praying to them according to a ritual called "The answer of the tongue".<sup>35</sup>

Two knowledgeable Jews who wrote about the Kaifeng community around the turn of the century, German-born, English-raised Marcus Nathan Adler, and an Austrian trader, J.L. Liebermann, discussed this ancestor worship from quite a different point of view than Gozani's or Finn's. Perlmann, who probably visited Kaifeng, cited the relevant passage from the synagogue's 1489 stele:

But to venerate Heaven and to neglect ancestors is to fail in the services which are their due. In the spring and autumn, therefore, men sacrifice to their ancestors, to show that they serve the dead as they do the living, and pay the same respect to the departed that they do to those who survive, they offer sheep and oxen, and present the fruits of the season, to show that they do not neglect the honour due to ancestors, when they are gone from us.<sup>36</sup>

And Adler, based on his readings, described the ancestor hall in the synagogue:

In the second division of the court was the hall of ancestors (*Tsoo-lang*). Here were venerated—probably at the high festivals in the spring and autumn—the Patriarches of Old Testament history after the Chinese manner. The name of each was recorded on a tablet; there were no pictures; to each of them was assigned a censer for incense, the largest being for Abraham, others for the other patriarches, Moses, Aaron, Joshua and Ezra.<sup>37</sup>

In attempting to account for this custom, which appears unique

from a Jewish point of view, Perlmann commented upon the practice of displaying gifts from local notables in the synagogue:

... although this custom is hardly compatible with Jewish law, it may be excused when taking into consideration that the censers were presented to them by the Emperor (of the Ming Dynasty, 1368-1644 A.D.) and it was the Emperor himself who gave them the necessary instructions for burning the incense; and after all it was not used for idolatrous purposes.<sup>38</sup>

Gozani wrote that the custom was entirely Chinese, except for avoiding the use of images: "They honour their dead in the Tz'u-t'ang, or Hall of the Ancestors, with the same ceremonies as are employed in China; but without tablets, they being forbidden the use of images and of everything of that kind".<sup>39</sup> Being more familiar with Jewish practices, Leslie noted the very strong parallel between Confucian ancestor worship (if, indeed, that is an accurate name for the practice) and Jewish memorial services: "... the Jewish Yiskor and Jahrzeit services for the dead are similar to Chinese ancestor worship, even though the Jewish theologians insist that it is only God who is prayed to".<sup>40</sup>

Kaifeng Jews adopted some other Confucian practices as well, including the use of Jewish "sacred books in casting lots, and their literary men pay the same homage to the memory of Kung-foo-sze (Confucius) as their neighbors do".<sup>41</sup> Such a practice, like the foregrounding of the thrice-annual *yizkor* rite for the dead and annual marking of relatives' death anniversaries, do not seem to compromise Kaifeng Judaism. As with the foregrounding of ascetical and noble symbol complexes in Cochin Judaism, the Kaifeng Jews were emphasizing certain Judaic rituals which approximated Confucian practices. But what of the reverence for Kung-fu-tze, mentioned by Finn? Did that practice, about which we know so very little, indicate a compromise beyond acceptable Judaic boundaries?

#### *Ethics of Religious "Civicness"*

The Kaifeng Jews' reverence for Kung-fu-tze must be viewed in the context of the Chinese ethical teachings with which he is most closely associated. As recorded in the stele of 1488, the Jews found in Chinese traditions a system of ethics deeply resonant with their own:

Although our religion agrees in many respects with the religion of the literati [Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism], from which it differs in a slight degree, yet the main design of it is nothing more than reverence for Heaven, and veneration for ancestors, fidelity to the prince, and obedience to parents, just that which is included in the five human relations, the five constant virtues, with the three principal connections of life.<sup>42</sup>

It is not difficult to see the relationship between Judaic and Confucian values. For examples: Reverence for “Heaven”, the Confucian value, corresponds to reverence for God, as T’ien, or Heaven, is the Chinese character used by Jews, Muslims, Christians and Confucians alike to translate “God”.<sup>43</sup> Veneration for ancestors, as noted, is a value underlying both Confucian ancestor worship and Judaic *yizkor* and death anniversary rites. Obedience to parents is cardinal in both traditions, and is one element in the Mosaic decalogue. The five human relationships was Kung-fu-tze’s model for harmonious human interactions, both in the home (*shalom habayit*) and in society at large.

From a Confucian point of view, fidelity to the prince is an extension of the principle of obedience to parents. From a Judaic perspective, the *halachic* principle is that the law of the land in which Jews live is binding upon Jews, so long as the law of the land does not contravene *Halacha*.<sup>44</sup> Jews emphasize this sort of patriotism, quite naturally, in nations which treat the Jews well, as in India and America. This sentiment is clearly expressed in the stele of 1488: “[S]eeing that we have received the favours of the prince, and enjoyed the emoluments conferred by him, we carry to the utmost our sincerity in worship with the view of manifesting fidelity to our prince, and gratitude to our country”.<sup>45</sup> In Confucian society, fidelity to the prince was understood as a prerequisite for civilized life, a view endorsed in Chinese Judaism. But more generally, as Leslie aptly summarized, it was in the domain of ethics that Confucianism and Judaism have the greatest similarity, as perhaps do all of the great religions of the world, and it was in the domain of ethics that acculturation was least problematic:

To turn to ethics, there is sufficient similarity between the customs and beliefs about good and evil in almost all civilised communities for harmony [between Jewish and Confucian ideas] to be easily achieved. One has no difficulty in finding parallels between the Confucian and Jewish classics. Mencius, the Li-chi, the I-ching, are quoted to demonstrate the similarities. We may note, in particular, filial piety and ritual, reliance on tradition and the written word, all strongly emphasised in both cultures.<sup>46</sup>

*Indigenous “Theologies”*

Apparently, however, the Jews’ religious acculturation into Confucian society did not end with ethics. There was, rather, an increasing identification with Confucian and Taoist concepts and practices, and gradually they maintained less and less religious distinctiveness. For example, a painted board in the Kaifeng Synagogue proclaimed: “From the time of Alo (Abraham), when our religion was first established, and ever afterwards, China has diffused instruction and obtained the knowledge of the whole system propagated by Confucius, Buddha, and Lautze”.<sup>47</sup> Leslie gives several examples of this religious identification:

Here are some examples of the conscious attempt to demonstrate the close similarity of Judaism to Confucianism. “The Confucian religion and this religion agree on essential points, differing only on secondary ones (1489) ... these principles do not go beyond the Five Relationships (of Confucianism) (1489) ... Although the written characters of the Scriptures of this religion are different from the script of the Confucian books, yet on examining their principles, it is found that their ways of common practice are similar (1512)”.<sup>48</sup>

This identification of Judaic with Confucian religious ideas, according to some scholars, was the model of and model for their assimilation.<sup>49</sup>

Perlmann was the first to suggest that this religious identification with Confucian tradition, spurred by the very high cultural and ethical standards prevalent in Chinese society, was a factor which contributed to the demise through assimilation of the Kaifeng community:

Two forces combined worked simultaneously towards the doom of the Jews in China, one of them being of a physical character, and the other of a purely spiritual one. By the physical force I mean the overwhelming majority of the native people, which, in a case of being not of a lower cultural standing than the alien minority, and if in intercourse with the foreigner treats him kindly, not making him feel to be a stranger, must in course of time, by quite a natural process grind the minority, crumble off parts of them and gradually absorb them. This normal process, which acted upon the Jews of China had been considerably accelerated by inundations and revolutions which time after time decimated them and lessened their power of resistance. By the spiritual force I understand the high ethical and philosophical standing of the religions of China at that time, which ... caused the Jews to abdicate their superiority, to take up Chinese learning, and to assimilate to and mingle with the dominant majority.<sup>50</sup>

A similar point was later emphasized by Wendy Abraham. Having considered the many scholarly explanations for the assimilation of Kaifeng Jews, she more than any other scholar attributes their assimilation to an inherent similarity between Confucian and Judaic traditions, which led the Jews to lose their sense of a people “called apart” (*am segulah*):

While some have attributed the reasons for Jewish assimilation into Chinese society to isolation from the rest of the Jewish world since the Ming dynasty (1368-1644), if not before, or the lack of persecution by the Chinese government, others have posited that their assimilation was due, rather, to the fact that the Jews took and passed the Chinese civil service exam in disproportionate numbers to their population, leading to their being assigned cities other than their own, to the Confucianization of intellectuals, intermarriage in their newly adopted towns and the acculturation of the Kaifeng Jewish community which was still under the influence of these Jewish Confucians ... [It was] the Chinese educational system ... [and its similarity to] the educational values held by Jews at their time of entry into China and through the time they were most likely cut off from the rest of world Jewry, [which] were so similar to those held by the Chinese at the time that it could not have done otherwise than attract them [to the Chinese civil service] ... [B]oth people's educational values, in particular the perceived link between the cultivation of individual and communal ethics ... and national survival ... [as well as] Similarities between Talmudic and Confucian methods of teaching and learning ... led to their inevitable participation and success in the civil service exam, with the resultant assimilation into Chinese society.<sup>51</sup>

Living in such a tolerant culture with values perceived as similar, if not identical, to their own, Kaifeng Jews gradually neglected Judaic traditions, especially as their best and brightest studied Confucian classics for the civil service examinations, a process highlighted in Abraham's analysis. As Leslie observed, synagogue inscriptions and banners became more Confucian than Judaic: “The terminology of the Chinese inscriptions from the synagogue is highly Confucian, with a few touches of Taoism. The ideas expressed are sometimes Jewish in Confucian garb, but more often Confucian per se. We hardly ever find passages from the Jewish Law translated into Chinese”.<sup>52</sup>

### *Contrasting Styles of Acculturation*

The Judaisms of Cochin and Kaifeng were similar and they were different in their relationship to their local religious environments, Hindu and Confucian. They were similar in the way they adapted

local ritual practices into their *minhagim*. In Cochin, it was the ascetical and noble symbols of Kerala's Hinduisms which found their way into Judaic practices—Passover and Simchat Torah in particular. In Kaifeng, it was the foregrounding of Judaic “ancestor worship”—*yizkor* and death anniversaries. Neither of these sets of ritual acculturation were problematic .

But they were also very different, for several reasons. We have indicated that while both Judaisms incorporated gifts from the local nobility into their synagogues, in Cochin these gifts were essentially Judaic (Torah crowns, carpets used for the *duchen* rite, etc., with the notable exception of the copper plates, which are religiously neutral), in Kaifeng these gifts were Confucian (incense holders, steles and painted boards emblazoned with other than Judaic slogans).

These displays reflected differing ideational and social realities. On the ideational level, the Cochin Jews never went so far as to identify their religious ideas with Hindu ideas, despite the great respect and gratitude which characterized their view of their neighbors' religions. For example, in their indigenous literature Cochini authors tended to emphasize Judaism's distinctiveness from the Hinduism, Islam and Christianity of their neighbors.<sup>53</sup> In the inscriptions of the Kaifeng Jews, it was similarities with Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism which were given prominence.

On the social level, we are confronted with the profound differences in the societies in and around Kaifeng and Cochin. First, however, one vitally important similarity in these otherwise disparate cultures must be emphasized: both Chinese and Indian cultures were tolerant in the extreme; the Jews of Kaifeng and the Jews of Cochin never experienced anti-Semitism, making them unique among the world's Jews; and the Jews of both China and India enjoyed freedom of religion among other freedoms, and they prospered in the security of these noble cultures.

As Abraham emphasized in her doctoral dissertation, leading Kaifeng Jews entered the Chinese civil service. To do so, they neglected Judaic learning for the Confucian classics, which were the basis of the civil service examination. It was the very openness of the civil service to foreigners which was the key factor in Jewish assimilation and the demise of Chinese Jewry.

In traditional, hierarchical India, however, such assimilation was never an option. Traditional Indian society was a complex system of localized and caste-bound cultures which interacted through the principle of hierarchy.<sup>54</sup> The much-vaunted Hindu “tolerance”, a term which does not do justice to the actual experience of Jews there, is in many senses the antithesis of Chinese “tolerance”—or, for that matter, of the secular-liberal modern version of “tolerance” found in the west and westernized worlds. Traditional Hindu “tolerance” does not posit either a universal culture, a universal religion, or a universal human nature to which all aspirants for success in a society must adhere and conform. Rather, the hierarchical nature of traditional India creates the societal space for human diversity, a space which has accommodated wave after wave of refugees—first Jews, and later Nestorian Christians, then Zoroastrians, and most recently Tibetans. China, too, welcomed foreigners, and foreign enclaves took pride in their Sinicization. But Sinicization proved fatal to the Jewish communities who embraced the opportunities it afforded. In India, success and status were more matters of fidelity to one’s own tradition than mastery of another’s. And therein lies the essential divergence between the Judaisms of Cochin and Kaifeng.

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<sup>1</sup> The clearest framework for the comparative study of minority Jewish communities was offered by Stephen Sharot, “Minority Situation and Religious Acculturation: a Comparative Analysis of Jewish Communities”, pp. 329-354 in *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 16 (1974).

<sup>2</sup> Rabbi Abraham Chill, *The Minhagim: The Customs and Ceremonies of Judaism, Their Origins and Rationale*, New York: Sepher-Hermon Press, 1979, p. vii.

<sup>3</sup> See Barbara C. Johnson, “‘For Any Good Occasion We Call Them’: Community Parties and Cultural Continuity among the Cochin Paradesi Jews of Israel”, pp. 42-71 in Nathan Katz, ed., *Studies of Indian-Jewish Identity*, Ann Arbor, MI: Association for Asian Studies; and New Delhi: Manohar, AAS Monographs Series no. 1, 1994.

<sup>4</sup> So the Kaifeng Jew, Ai-Tien, reported to the Jesuit Fr. Matteo Ricci. See James Finn, "The Jews in China: Their Synagogue, Their Scriptures, Their History", pp. 1-91 in Hyman Kublin, ed., *Jews in Old China: Some Western Views*, New York: Paragon Book Reprint Corp., 1971 [1843], p. 11.

<sup>5</sup> P.J. Thomas, "The South Indian Tradition of the Apostle Thomas", pp. 213-23 in *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* (1924), p. 214.

<sup>6</sup> Lt. M.J. Rowlandson, *Tohfut-ul-mujahideen, an Historical Work in the Arabic Language*, by Zain al-Din, London: Oriental Translation Fund, 1833.

<sup>7</sup> We are using the terms "sacred space" and "sacred time" as first suggested by Mircea Eliade in *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1959.

<sup>8</sup> At different times, the Cochin Jews narrated alternate origin legends. For example, a couple of centuries back when Europe was in search of lost tribes, they claimed to be a lost tribe. Some of their Malayalam-language folk songs indicate a Persian origin, and at times Yemen was proclaimed their ancestral home. Today's version claims a dual ancestry from Jerusalem and Cranganore; the reasons for these narrative shifts are explored in Nathan Katz and Ellen S. Goldberg, *The Last Jews of Cochin: Jewish Identity in Hindu India*, Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1993.

<sup>9</sup> This analysis of the Cochin Jews' origin legends follows upon the work of Barbara C. Johnson, "The Emperor's Welcome: Reconsiderations of an Origin Theme in Cochin Jewish Folklore", pp. 161-176 in Thomas A. Timberg, ed., *The Jews of India*, New Delhi: Vikas, 1986.

<sup>10</sup> The meaning of Cranganore for the Cochin Jews is explored in Barbara C. Johnson, "Shingli or Cranganore in the Traditions of the Cochin Jews of India, with an Appendix on the Cochin Jewish Chronicles". M.A. thesis, Smith College, 1975.

<sup>11</sup> Similarly, Knani Christians narrate how the "Cheraman Pedrumal" king who welcomed the Christian missionary who founded their community, Thomas of Cana in 345 CE, converted to Christianity and made pilgrimage to the tomb of St. Thomas the Apostle in Mylapore, Madras. There he died and was buried alongside the Apostle. "It seems that Cheraman Perumal is a good empty name to fill with whatever events satisfy the audience of the faithful. He legitimates one or another foreign religion in India by welcoming its proselytes and himself becoming a convert in the end". Richard Michael Swiderski, *Blood Weddings: The Knanaya Christians of Kerala*, Madras: New Era Publishers, 1988, p. 64.

<sup>12</sup> William Logan, *Malabar*, vol. I, Trivandrum: Charithram Publications, 1981, p. 265.

<sup>13</sup> M.G.S. Narayanan, *Cultural Symbiosis in Kerala*, Trivandrum: Kerala Historical Society, 1972, p. ix.

<sup>14</sup> Logan, *Malabar*, p. 269.

<sup>15</sup> Narayanan, *Cultural Symbiosis in Kerala*, pp. 38-42.

<sup>16</sup> Finn, "The Jews in China", p. 42; see also Edward I. Ezra and Arthur Sopher, "Chinese Jews", pp. 213-295 in Kublin, ed., *Jews in Old China*, p.222.

<sup>17</sup> Donald Daniel Leslie, *The Survival of the Chinese Jews: The Jewish Community of Kaifeng*, Leiden: E.J. Brill, T'oung Pao Monograph 10, 1972, p. 3.

<sup>18</sup> Leslie, *The Survival of the Chinese Jews*, p. 18.

<sup>19</sup> S.M. Perlmann, "The History of the Jews in China", pp. 119-212 in Kublin, ed., *Jews in Old China*, p. 125.

<sup>20</sup> Leslie, *The Survival of the Chinese Jews*, p. 22.

- <sup>21</sup> Leslie, *The Survival of the Chinese Jews*, pp. 22-23.
- <sup>22</sup> Marcus N. Adler, "Chinese Jews: A Lecture", pp. 93-118 in Kublin, ed., *Jews in Old China*, p. 97.
- <sup>23</sup> Finn, "The Jews in China", p. 68.
- <sup>24</sup> Leslie, *The Survival of the Chinese Jews*, p. 40.
- <sup>25</sup> Finn, "The Jews in China", p. 62.
- <sup>26</sup> Perlmann, "The History of the Jews in China", p. 129.
- <sup>27</sup> Clifford Geertz, *Negara: The Theatre State in Nineteenth-Century Bali*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980, p. 25.
- <sup>28</sup> Nathan Katz and Ellen S. Goldberg, "The Ritual Enactments of the Cochins Jews: The Powers of Purity and Nobility", *Journal of Ritual Studies* 4, 2 (Summer 1990), pp. 200-201.
- <sup>29</sup> Chill, *The Minhagim*, p. xx.
- <sup>30</sup> Nathan Katz and Ellen S. Goldberg, "Asceticism and Caste in the Passover Observances of the Cochins Jews", *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 57, 1 (1989), pp. 53-82.
- <sup>31</sup> Katz and Goldberg, "The Ritual Enactments of the Cochins Jews", p. 202.
- <sup>32</sup> Katz and Goldberg, "The Ritual Enactments of the Cochins Jews", p. 230.
- <sup>33</sup> Katz and Goldberg, "The Ritual Enactments of the Cochins Jews", p. 231.
- <sup>34</sup> Leslie, *The Survival of the Chinese Jews*, p. 81.
- <sup>35</sup> Finn, "The Jews in China", pp. 73-74.
- <sup>36</sup> Perlmann, "The Jews in China", p. 177. Wendy Abraham notes that the form of ancestral sacrifice described in the stele is identical with that prescribed in the Confucian classic, *The Doctrine of the Mean*. "The Role of Confucian and Jewish Educational Values in the Assimilation of the Chinese Jews of Kaifeng, Supplemented by Western Observer Accounts, 1605-1985", Ed.D. dissertation, Columbia University Teachers College, 1989, p. 55.
- <sup>37</sup> Adler, "Chinese Jews: A Lecture", p. 104.
- <sup>38</sup> Perlmann, "The Jews in China", p. 129.
- <sup>39</sup> Leslie, *The Survival of the Chinese Jews*, p. 88.
- <sup>40</sup> Leslie, *The Survival of the Chinese Jews*, p. 101.
- <sup>41</sup> Finn, "The Jews in China", 29. Unfortunately, Finn gives no evidence that Jews used their Torah for divination, as do Confucians with the *I Ching*. One wonders about the techniques employed.
- <sup>42</sup> Perlmann, "The History of the Jews in China", pp. 182-83.
- <sup>43</sup> Leslie, *The Survival of the Chinese Jews*, p. 98.
- <sup>44</sup> This principle of Judaic 'civicness' was first articulated in Babylonia in the third century CE by Mar Samuel of Nehardea, who ruled that "the law of the ruling authority (*malkhuta*) is the law". It was restated by the twelfth century French authority Rabbi Samuel ben Meir (Rashba), who opined that "All the levies and taxes and legal procedures enacted by kings in their kingdoms are binding as law (*dina*)". See David Novak, *Jewish-Christian Dialogue: A Jewish Justification*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1989, pp. 42-43.
- <sup>45</sup> Perlmann, "The History of the Jews in China", p. 183.
- <sup>46</sup> Leslie, *The Survival of the Chinese Jews*, p. 101.
- <sup>47</sup> Ezra and Sopher, "Chinese Jews", p. 245.
- <sup>48</sup> Leslie, *The Survival of the Chinese Jews*, p. 102.
- <sup>49</sup> We employ Geertz's understanding of a religious symbol as "model of/for" to describe the process by which a religious symbolization simultaneously reflects empirical realities and shapes those realities. Clifford Geertz, "Religion as a

Cultural System", pp. 639-688 in *The Religious Situation*, Boston: Beacon Press, vol. 2, 1968-69. Similarly, the founder of the social-scientific approach to the study of religion, Emile Durkheim, held that we misunderstand religious ideals (or symbols) if we separate those ideals from the real, empirical world. Rather Durkheim argued, the 'ideal' and the 'real' are mutually determinative. Emile Durkheim, "The False Dichotomy of the Real and the Ideal", in *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, New York: Macmillan, 1961, pp. 469-72, 474-79.

<sup>50</sup> Perlmann, "The History of the Jews in China", p. 197.

<sup>51</sup> Abraham, "Confucian and Jewish Educational Values", pp. i-ii.

<sup>52</sup> Leslie, *The Survival of the Chinese Jews*, p. 102.

<sup>53</sup> See, for example, the analysis of the sacred calendars of Judaism, Hinduism, Islam and Christianity by David Rahabi, *Hasefer David Rahabi*, Amsterdam: Proops, 1791.

<sup>54</sup> See Louis Dumont, *Homo Hierarchicus: The Caste System and Its Implications*, Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1980.

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# BUDDHISM AND ISLAM: PAST TO PRESENT ENCOUNTERS AND INTERFAITH LESSONS

DAVID SCOTT

## *Summary*

The paper deals with the encounter and ensuing responses that can be traced between Buddhism and Islam, during their centuries of contact across Asia (Anatolia, Iran, Central Asia, India), and more recently in the West. Within this panorama of history certain immediate overtly negative images of the other can be perceived in both traditions, manifested in terms of actions and literature. However some more positive images seem to have crystallised in Islam, particularly and significantly within the mystical Sufi streams that emerged in the East Iranian and Central Asian lands. Such historical patterns of confrontation, convergence and mysticism lead into the more modern second part of the study. A geographical-political perspective is first used, as the variations in their relationship in the various countries of SE Asia, and the British situation are noted. This is followed by a review of potential approaches between Islam and Buddhism in the current inter-faith dialogue arena. Whilst some doctrinal areas may be reconcilable (according to Cleary), it is primarily in other areas that more promising avenues of approach may be discerned. One is the area of ethics and social action on issues of common concern, as suggested by figures like Badawi, Gilliat, Askari and Vajiragnana. Another one is in contemplational areas of mysticism, as acknowledged by figures like Idries Shah. In both areas this can be echoed in greater clarity in the Christian-Buddhist dialogue. A further implication may be to bring out the need to view religions in functionalist and transformational terms, rather than culture bound doctrinal norms.

In today's world, the most common inter-faith settings involve Christianity. This has involved Christianity in fruitful dialogue with the other cross-cultural 'universalistic', for want of a better term, religions of Islam and Buddhism; together with more 'particularistic' religions of Hinduism, and Judaism. However dialogue interactions between religions have been to some degree lopsided, insofar as dialogue relations between non-Christian traditions have tended to be much less prominent—be it because of politically charged factors as in the case of the relationship between Judaism and Islam, previous history as in the case of Hinduism and Buddhism, or because of relative unfamiliarity as in the case of Judaism

and Buddhism. Within the triangle of the three 'universalistic' traditions, the relations between Buddhism and Islam have tended to remain relatively unexplored, both in interfaith and academic terms. The object of this study is to present some quite significant interactions in the past, and to try to get a sense of where these two traditions are presently heading in their current encounters with each other. Wider implications might also be present for the interfaith dialogue movement. Let us look to each of these in turn, bearing in mind that any talk of responses is a two-way process, operating at various levels, and not always recorded for posterity.

### (1) *Previous Patterns*

As soon as Islam had defeated the Sasanian Empire and was starting to move into the East Iranian lands beyond the Oxus, it encountered strongly entrenched Buddhist communities. The next ten centuries was to take Islam from those Iranian lands, progressively through the trading cities of the Silk Route like Kashgar, until it lost its momentum amidst the Chinese milieu. During this time the religious map of Asia was one whereby Buddhism was gradually giving way, with some temporary reversals under the Mongols, to Islam. Such an encounter for Islam was a striking one in many senses. Most obviously was the fact that in encountering Buddhism, Islam was moving out of the bounds of the traditional Islam religious universe. The Qur'an, bedrock of Islam, showed awareness and some knowledge of Christianity, Judaism and Zoroastrianism, but nothing further East. Thus, although there was Qur'anic authority for treating Christianity, Judaism and Zoroastrianism in a certain way as 'People of the Book', there was no such setting established for dealing with Buddhism, or indeed Hinduism for that matter. It came to be held that polytheists (*mushrikun*) were to be given the choice of conversion, departure or death. There seem to be certain areas that can be pinpointed, namely previous patterns of confrontation, readjustment, and mystical interaction.

### *Confrontation*

What is clear is that the initial Islamic impact upon Buddhism was stark. One example of this is at the end of the 12th century with

the Islamic occupation and sack of Nalanda, the central Buddhist seat of learning in North India. Mahmud of Ghazna's regular raids down from the Hindukush brought sacking of Buddhist *vihāras* at Kabul and other centres. We should be careful here, as Ling has argued that such Muslim actions were not in themselves the cause for Buddhism's disappearance from India, instead arguing that Buddhism was already declining before Islam dealt a final blow.<sup>1</sup>

Buddhist texts themselves show awareness and worry about the advancing Islamic armies. As early as 751 we have the Korean pilgrim Ou-'kong avoiding Islamic areas already occupied in Afghanistan, as he made his way from Central Asia down into India. One very clear example of mounting worry is the Tibetan *Kālacakra Tantra* (9th century), which talks about the man from Baghdad, 'Madhumati' [i.e. Muhammad] who would be a false impostor, wreaking havoc on the Buddhist world.<sup>2</sup> Another example are texts from Khotan, which talk about the future decline of Buddhist fortunes from advancing Persian armies, i.e. Islam.<sup>3</sup>

Mongol expansion in the 13th century pitched Islam and Buddhism against each other as opportunities arose for greater Buddhist expansion westwards into the Islamic areas of Persia and even Asia Minor. Conversely, Islam could hope to also win further support eastwards in the Buddhist areas. Juvainī, having visited Buddhist areas in the Tarim basin, lamented how:

The Uighur adopted idolatry (*but-parastī*) as their religion, and most of the other tribes followed their example. And there are none more bigoted than the 'idolaters' of the East and none more hostile to Islam.<sup>4</sup>

Conversely the post-Mongol late 14th century Uighur *Insādi-sutra* had Buddhist denunciation of Islam, Muhammad described as evil, and messianic hopes expressed that Maitreya the future Buddha would soon return and even win over the kingdom of Baghdad (*bagdat*).<sup>5</sup>

The reasons for this stark initial contact would seem to be that Islam saw Buddhism as suffering from the twin evils of idolatry, through its use of richly decorated visual statues and paintings; and of atheism, through not having a theistic God at the centre of their religious system. Denunciation of Buddhism's supposed idolatry was a strong feature of early Islamic writers—so much so that the

very word buddha passed into Persian as *but*, becoming a generic word for 'idol', as Melikian-Chirvani's study brings out.<sup>6</sup> Consequently, Buddhists could be considered as analogous to the *kafirs* 'unbelievers' discussed in the Qur'an who could indeed be given the choice of conversion, expulsion, or execution. Initially Buddhism does not seem to have been given official toleration as being a 'People of the Book', a status given to Christianity, Judaism, and Zoroastrianism. Tantric Buddhism, with its explicit visual acceptance of sexuality, could seem for a more austere Islam little more than decadent corruption.

Within such a framework, *jihad* 'struggle' could take its martial face as the 'Holy War'. One late but clear cut example of this frame of mind was in the (17th-century) *Tā'rikh-i-Rashidi*, where Mirza Haydar discussed the actions of the then ruler Sa'id Khan:

The khan's mind had always been occupied with plans for making a holy war (*ghazāt*) and after thought he finally decided. Between Khotan and China (*Khitāi*) there was a race of infidels called Sārigh Uighurs, and upon these people he proceeded to make a holy war... The holy war is one of the supports of Islam and a plenary duty. The khan decided to discharge this obligation towards the faith.<sup>7</sup>

His actions followed in the line of Khizr-Khoja who had moved against the Buddhist centres of Turfan. In the words of the *Tā'rikh-i-Rashidi* "the khan undertook a holy war (*ghazāt*) against China (*Khitāi*). He in person, attacked and conquered Karakhoja and Turfan ... and forced their inhabitants to become Musulmans, so at the moment it is called Dār al-Islām".<sup>8</sup> Within such a framework, reversion from Islam back to Buddhism would then have faced the *Shari'a* legal situation that apostasy from Islam was a capital offence.

### *Adjustment*

Although the preceding details exemplify overtly negative perceptions, other more flexible and positive adjustments can be suggested. One relatively straightforward direct example is some Islamic consideration of Buddhists (like Hindus) as indeed being a 'People of the Book', to whom a degree of legitimacy could thus be offered.<sup>9</sup> A further sign of some Islamic adjustment concerned the

figure of the Buddha. Here, a complex but interesting process can be traced with regard to the life stories concerning Buddha. Before not too long, Muslim writers began to notice the Indian figure and religious adherents stemming from *al-budd*, and *Būdāsf*, a rendering of Buddha and Bodhisattva. The curious thing though, as Gimaret's French study noted, was how they were not always identified as being from the same tradition.<sup>10</sup> Moreover elements of fantasy and vagueness appear in the accounts by writers like al-Nadīm, Istakhrī, al-Bīrūnī, and so forth. A more comprehensive specific Islamic retention of the legends of the Buddha is in the *Kitāb Balawhar wa-Būdāsf*. Moreover, the 10th century Shī'ite theologian Ibn Bābūya, in his excerpts from the above work, also included three further stories. One of those ('The Story of the King's Grey Hair') is an echo of the *Makhadeva Jātaka* story. The second further story has 'The Prince who flees his home...', which reflects the existing prototype of the Buddha's encounters as a prince with death, old age and sickness.<sup>11</sup>

However, it is really only with al-Shahrastānī (c. 1076-1153) that we first get precise accurate descriptions about Indian traditions concerning the Buddha (*al-budd*). His account of Buddhism is indeed as Gimaret noted "remarkable" for its precision, being a virtual rendering of some Buddhist catechism:

The first Buddha (*budd*) who appeared in the world was called Shakyamuni (*Shākman*), which means 'noble Lord'... On a lower rung from the Buddhas, they say, is the Bodhisattva (*Būdāsiya*).<sup>12</sup>

With respect to the Buddhist path, al-Shahrastānī depicts it positively enough; as a 'search for Truth' inculcating patience, giving, and detachment. This is then followed by a precepts-type listing of ten 'errors that are avoided', and the 'ten virtues that are practiced', i.e. a version of Buddhism's *sīlas* (ethics, precepts) and *pāramitās* ('perfections'). Particularly intriguing is al-Shahrastānī's comment that such teachings "can be very near to the teachings of the Sufis". It seems significant, in retrospect, that it is with this eminent Sufi that we have the most specific, accurate and quite sympathetic picture drawn of the message of Buddhism. There may be wider and modern implications in this.

*Mysticism*

Here two fruitful areas can be looked at, namely Ibrāhīm b. Adham of Balkh and the subsequent Central Asian Sufi schools of mysticism, and concepts like *fanāʾ*.

One of the earliest Sufis to come to note was (Prince) Ibrāhīm b. Adham of Balkh (d. c. 777). Some of the stories surrounding him have a decidedly Buddhist ring to them. One has him hunting a fox, when he heard a voice saying that God had not created him to persecute living beings. Obviously there is the theistic superimposition, but the stress on non-killing recalls the first of the major Buddhist precepts. Another even more telling episode concerns Ibrāhīm's starting on his journeys. The scene is set in Ibrāhīm's palace, whereupon he sees a beggar, who recommends the wandering spiritual life, moving Ibrāhīm to leave the palace for such a life. This seems nothing more than the reformulation of the Buddha's life story. That these early Sufis were aware of their Buddhist predecessors seems clear enough from Shaḳīḳ al-Balkhī's comment about his trading trip to Turkish cities, that "I went one day to a Buddhist temple, and saw one of their servants whom they call *toyīn* in the language of China (Khitāī) and *sthavira* in India. He had shaven his whole head and wore clothes of purple".<sup>13</sup> This would seem to be the sort of situation Idries Shah, a modern Sufi from Afghanistan had in mind with his note that "there are legends concerning Chinese Zen with India, and Sufi tradition asserts that the early classical Sufis made spiritual contact with the followers of *bodd* [Buddha]".<sup>14</sup> Balkh itself had the major Buddhist centre west of the Hindukush.

As Islam spread across the Turkish lands of Central Asia, subtle and in a sense positive signs of Islamic-Buddhist interaction can be seen centring around Sufism. In the *Kutadgu-bilig* written by Yusuf Khas Hadjib in 1068 at Kashgar, the learned Muslim mystic Ogdurmiš was depicted like a Buddhist hermit in a cave, carrying a begging bowl (*revke*) and staff (*tayak*). Instead of wearing the red draperies of earlier Turkish Buddhist masters, he was though shown with the white garb worn by the Sufi adepts.<sup>15</sup> Later on at Turfan, the Uighur Buddhist cave temples at Toyuq became the seat of Muslim Qalandar dervishes who considered the caves to be

the abode of the 'Seven Sleepers' of Islamic hagiography.<sup>16</sup> Furthermore the term *eren* (heroic saint) was used for both earlier Buddhist and later Muslim anchorites, together with artistic mandalas being transposed.<sup>17</sup> The Mongol advance into Persia and Anatolia brought examples of further suggestive echoes between Uighur Buddhist and Islamic figures, as for example Baba Baraq (died 1307), whose practices and literature evoke Tantric type ecstasy, together with such features as shaved head and face.<sup>18</sup> This juxtaposition of Sufi and Buddhist groups can be literally shown in the Tarim basin, with the account by the embassy from Shah Rukh to China in 1419-1422, which noted the Buddhist convent and Sufi *tekkē* side by side at Hami.<sup>19</sup>

When we consider Sufi concepts two particular themes suggest themselves. This concerns comparisons between Buddhism's 'enlightenment' and Sufism's *ittlaq*. This resonance is increased with the analogies between the Mahayana Buddhist idea of *śūnyatā* 'emptiness' which has been compared with the Sufi concept of *fanā* 'annihilation'. Moreover if *fanā* means annihilation of the ego then again this can start to approach the basic Buddhist concept of *anātman* 'no-soul'. Naturally one needs to be careful about making widespread but superficial comparisons. However there is perhaps the significant parallel way that scholars like Trimingham have distinguished between early Western and Eastern forms of Sufism.<sup>20</sup> To some extent the Eastern strand (East Iranian, Transoxanian) seemed to emphasise *fanā*, while the Western strands seemed to emphasise 'love'—possibly owing something to earlier respective Christian and Buddhist influences in those areas.

## (2) *Modern Situations*

Two modern areas come to mind, one is geographic settings and the other is Dialogue interaction.

### *Geographic Settings*

Here there are two general areas to look at. One is the actual geographical situations bringing Buddhism and Islam most into contact with each other, namely Sri Lanka, Bangladesh/Burma, S.

Thailand, and Malaysia.<sup>21</sup> The Chinese situation remains unclear due to the common blanket imposed upon both Islam and Buddhism by Chinese communism. In addition to these traditional areas, there has emerged the modern setting of encounter in the West, e.g. Britain.

With respect to those traditional areas there have been mixed situations. In Malaysia the mostly Buddhist Chinese community has been under some pressure from the Bumiputra policy pursued since the 1960s by the Mahathir government which equates Malays to being Muslim. In addition to this economic readjustment programme designed to equalise economic opportunities between the poorer Malay community and the wealthier Chinese community, there has been the rise of Islamic pressures. Partly this has expressed itself outside the government in the rise of the Islamic party, PAS. Partly this has shown itself in the tendency of the government to pursue more overtly Islamic policies, together with the rise of Ibrahim Anwar within the ruling UMNO party. In Burma the situation seems somewhat reversed as minority Muslim groups have fled into Bangladesh, at the hands of authoritarian Burmese policies. While the Burmese government is military rather than specifically Buddhist, the image still created for Islam is one of a Muslim minority being persecuted in a Buddhist majority country. A more settled situation seems present in South Thailand where a co-operative policy by the Buddhist supported Thai government has meant little outward discontent in the Muslim southern provinces on the border with Malaysia. An interesting situation can be seen in Sri Lanka. Amidst the ravage of civil war, the Tamil Muslim community has tended to side with the majority (Buddhist) Sinhalese position in the face of the demands by their ethnic Tamil (Hindu) compatriots. A curious example of local relations there may be mutual pilgrimage focus on the Buddhist mountain site of Siripāda, known by Muslims as Adam's Peak.

The Western encounter is an interesting though unusual one. One factor is the slight element of unbalance. Islam has attracted some Western converts, like Cat Stevens (Yusuf Ali). Nevertheless, it remains a fairly ethnically based tradition, mostly from the Indian subcontinent. Buddhism tends to be a more varied community, both in the sense of ethnic diversity (Chinese, Tibetan,

Vietnamese, Sri Lankan), and with a higher proportion of Western adherents. Common racial issues may serve as a bridge between Sri Lankan Buddhists and Pakistani Muslims, but would not have the same potency in the case of 'White western' adherents. On the other hand the growth of modern Sufi derived groups (to some extent in the shadow of the New Age explosion of movements) does create some closer bridge between the two traditions, given the higher proportion of Westerners involved in that facet of Islam rather than the orthodox/exoteric strands.

### *'Dialogue' Interactions*

With regard to doctrine the situation is on the surface fairly bleak, as there are some clear divisions. For Buddhism there is the problem of Islam's concept of the Qur'an as alone being the full and accurate Divine Revelation, of Islam's principle of *naskh* 'abrogation' (Qur'an 2.106) of earlier traditions, of application of Shari'a law, and of course the theistic standpoint of Islam. Conversely, Buddhism's non-theistic approach is a major divide for Islam. However there have not as yet really developed much deeper systematic explorations between Islamic and Buddhist 'theologians' in the same way that it has developed between Christianity and Judaism, or Christianity and Buddhism. Such development has been hindered by Islam's weaker central institutional framework, blurring who could 'talk' on behalf of others.

An interesting example would be the sort of theological explorations towards Buddhism that have taken place by the Christian process theologian John Cobb. Abe Masao's Buddhist response to Cobb, also brings in Islam, through Abe's application of the traditional Mahayana *tri-kāya* '3 bodies (levels) of the Buddha' in the following equation:<sup>22</sup>

Boundless Openness	Dharma-kāya	Formless/Boundless Reality of Emptiness
God	Sambhoga-kāya	Allah/Amida
Lord	Nirmāṇa-kāya	Muḥammad/Shākyamuni

For Abe "this means that although 'Boundless Openness' embraces various forms of 'God' and 'lord' as their ultimate ground, this is not a blind acceptance but a critical acknowledge-

ment of them''.<sup>23</sup> This is because for Abe, God (i.e. Allah) and 'Emptiness' are standing on two distinctive levels, whereas Muḥammad and Shākyamuni Buddha operate on the same (ontological) level. The significance of 'Emptiness' for Abe was then pursued with regard to his theme of 'emptying' (*kenosis*) of God, and of the dynamic implications of *śūnyatā* 'emptiness'. Such comments were made in the context of dialogue and responses from Christian theologians, their implications remain to be pursued by Islamic commentators.

One interesting example of metaphysical enquiry has been from Cleary. For him "considered from the point of view of doctrinal format, Buddhism and Islam may well seem to be as dissimilar as religions could be ... when we look more closely at certain underlying elements, however we find similarities".<sup>24</sup> The underlying strands of convergence he isolated are several. He picked up Islamic views of Reality as being beyond words (Idries Shah), that what we perceive as the world is in fact dependent on our mind and sense perceptions (Ibn al-'Arabī and Shah), that the universe is continually being created and destroyed and created ('Abd al-Karīm Jīlī), the inter-relatedness and interdependence of things (al-Ghazālī, Rūmī), of skilful expediency in the outward form of teachings of things (Rūmī, Shah). It is no coincidence that these exemplars are all Sufis.

Islamic Sufi mysticism and Buddhism have several areas of convergence, both in terms of metaphysical doctrines, but also practical training. Cleary suggested some similar features here:

In both Buddhism and Islam, meditation is considered important for spiritual development. Meditation themes common to both include the powerlessness and nothingness of the self, the inevitability of death, the impermanence of all phenomena, the inconceivability of truth. In addition to silent meditation, recitation and incantation—of sacred writ, invocations and litanies, and mnemonic formulae—are very commonly used by Buddhists and Muslims. In the realm of instrumental literature, we find two special techniques—known in mystical Islam as 'scatter' and 'impact'—another shared feature of practical Buddhism and Islam.<sup>25</sup>

Nevertheless this area has remained somewhat underexplored. This is perhaps surprising, given the earlier signs of quite positive interaction at this level between Sufis and analogous Buddhist strands. It is also a little surprising in view of fruitful modern

interaction at this contemplative meditation level between Christians and Buddhists. The potential is clearly there though.

From the side of Islam, Idries Shah has for one thing shown awareness of this. This modern Sufi acknowledged “a resemblance between Sufi thought and practice and the strange allegedly typical Buddhist cult of Zen as practised in Japan is of great interest ... the similarities between Zen and Sufism, both in terminology, stories and activities of masters are considerable. From the Sufi viewpoint, the practice of Zen, as given in popular literature resembles irresistibly the working of a part of the technique of the ‘impact’ (*zarb*) of Sufism”, which leads Shah to talk of “a common denominator with the mystics” of Buddhism.<sup>26</sup>

Another fruitful area would seem to be in the ethical-social action sphere. Here the growth of a greater awareness of the social dimension (‘Engaged Buddhists’) together with Islam’s egalitarian “this worldly” thrust, is a potentially fruitful bridge. Liberation theologians like Aloysius Pieris have pinpointed what they call the ‘Ethico-Social’ bridge between Christianity and Buddhism. A similar bridge could surely be developed between Islam and Buddhism, leaving more obvious doctrinal divides to recede in centrality? Ironically Mirza Haider’s *Tā’rikh-i-Rashidi*, replete as it is with talks of the holy war (*ghazāt*) being waged by Islamic rulers against Buddhist centres in Central Asia, had more positive undercurrents still discernible, as with his observation:

In some histories Shakā Muni [i.e. Shākyamuni Buddha] is reckoned among the prophets of India, and some hold that he was a teacher (*hakim*). Also it is maintained that no one goes to Heaven by the mere acceptance of the faith and religion, but only in consequence of his works. If a Musulman performed good acts, he goes to heaven; if he did evil, he goes to Hell. This also applies to [these] infidels. They hold the Prophet in high esteem, but do not consider it the incumbent duty of the whole of mankind to be of his religion. They say: ‘your religion is true, and so is ours. In every religion one must conduct oneself well’.<sup>27</sup>

Such implicit possibilities have been explicitly suggested more recently by Sophie Gilliat who has directly pinpointed social-ethical issues as a particularly appropriate bridge between Islam and Buddhism, termed by her as common “hidden doctrines” such as “the desire to preserve life, welfare issues, and the struggle against human injustice”.<sup>28</sup> The involvement of the London Buddhist

Vihara in the 'Faith, Asylum, Refugees' campaign may be a sign of such co-operation over issues of common concern. Talk by Muslim dialogue figures like Hasan Askari, in conjunction with Christians like John Hick and Hans Küng, of constructing a truly Global Ethic is yet another sign.<sup>29</sup>

Certainly both religious traditions are encountering each other in more directed inter-faith settings. In the UK there are various local 'Inter-Faith groups', while at the national level there are frameworks like the Inter-Faith Network which also acts as a link between the two communities. There have also been some signs of more direct contacts between the two traditions. One small but valuable example is the annual visit to the Muslim College by Vajiragnana, chief monk at the London Buddhist Vihara. An interesting example of the potential for academic widening of horizons is provided there at the Muslim College, by the comparative 'Fundamentalism in Religion' course, taught by Professor Hamid.

### *Conclusions*

Here two areas can be considered. First, what are the likely developments in the Islamic-Buddhist encounter. Second, are there wider implications for the whole dialogue movement?

With regard to the first question area, it would clearly seem that the mystical (contemplative/meditational) and ethical bridges are indeed the most fruitful areas, though theological/conceptual progress is not impossible (echoes of 'process theology' on the far horizon). However such areas of potential progress are not likely to be helped by Islamic 'fundamentalism', or indeed any Buddhist counterpart. Obviously there are dangers here in using such wide-ranging and inevitably clumsy terms. Nevertheless what has been called 'fundamentalism' does manifest certain clear enough tendencies—in particular the strongest authority allocated (with a generally literalistic interpretation) to the central scripture and readiness to apply or enforce it onto others in society. This also tends to involve a reduction in any merit seen outside that tradition.

With regard to the future of the whole dialogue movement there

may be a couple of interesting implications. Firstly it may well be that the mystical and ethical approaches are indeed the most effective bridges. This reflects a fairly pragmatic sense. However, in a more profound sense, if we view religion as ultimately instrumental rather than definitional in conceptual terms, then it is precisely instrumental/transformational areas of practice and conduct that need to be developed, whereas doctrine may in spiritual terms no longer be the actual central issue anyway. Such an instrumentalist criteria for inter-faith dialogue can perhaps be explored further.

Here two final wider messages come to mind from Islam and Buddhism. One is that succinctly expressed by Badawi in 1991, that “when you come to moral values and practical projects you find common ground”.<sup>30</sup> A second is the message delivered to the gathering of the Parliament of the World Religions in February 1994. In an open letter the Venerable Samu Sunim pleaded:’

Today we religious leaders and teachers of the world are facing unprecedented new opportunities for our future together in a global village as well as severe challenges from the secular world. In order to seize upon these opportunities for our common future we must change. We would have to depart from our traditional religious attitudes and open our heart in order to introduce to the world community a new religious consciousness and vision for peace, happiness and ecological justice.<sup>31</sup>

This may be a fitting moment to leave this topic of the interaction past and present between Islam and Buddhism, looking as it does practically yet with hope to the future.

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<sup>1</sup> T. Ling, *Buddhist revival in India. Aspects of the Sociology of religion*, London, 1980, ch. 3.

<sup>2</sup> H. Hoffman, “Kālacakra Studies. I. Manichaeism, Islam, and Christianity in the Kalacakra Tantra”, *Central Asiatic Journal*, 13, 1969, pp. 52-73.

<sup>3</sup> F. Thomas, “Buddhism in Khotan: its decline according to two Tibetan accounts”, *Sir Asutosh Mookerjee Silver Jubilee Volume*, vol. 3, part 3, Calcutta, 1927, pp. 30-52.

<sup>4</sup> Juvaini, *The History of the World Conqueror (Ta’rikh-i jahān qushā)*, tr. J. Boyle, Manchester, 1958, p. 60.

<sup>5</sup> *Das uigurische Insādi-Sutra*, tr. S. Texcan, Berlin, 1974, p. 71. Cf. comments by H. Klimkeit, "Christians, Buddhists and Manichaeans in medieval Central Asia", *Buddhist-Christian Studies*, 1, 1981, pp. 46-50, p. 47.

<sup>6</sup> A. Melikian-Chirvani, "L'évocation littéraire du Bouddhisme dans l'Iran Musulman", *Le Monde Iranien et l'Islam*, 11, 1974, pp. 1-72.

<sup>7</sup> *A History of the Moghuls of Central Asia. Being the Tarikh-i-Rashidi of Mirza Muhammad Haidar, Dughlat*, tr. E. Denison Ross and ed. N. Elias, London, 1895, p. 348.

<sup>8</sup> *ibid.*, p. 52.

<sup>9</sup> A. Hamid, *Islam: the Natural Way*, London, 1989, p. 147.

<sup>10</sup> D. Gimaret, "Bouddha et les Bouddhistes dans la tradition Musulmane", *Journal Asiatique*, 267, 1969, pp. 273-316.

<sup>11</sup> *3 unknown Buddhist stories in an Arabic version*, tr. S. Stern and S. Walzer, Oxford, 1971.

<sup>12</sup> Gimaret, pp. 277-278 for text.

<sup>13</sup> Awfi text passage cited E. Esin, "The Turkish Bakši and the painter Muhammad Kalam", *Acta Orientalia*, 32, 1970, pp. 81-114, fn. 9 on p. 84. Early comparison of Ibrahim stories with those earlier prototypes of the Buddha in T. Duka, "The influence of Buddhism on Islam", *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 1904, pp. 125-141.

<sup>14</sup> I. Shah, *The Sufis*, London, 1969, p. 363.

<sup>15</sup> See Esin, p. 101.

<sup>16</sup> *idem.*, "An aspect of the Turkish mediacy in the westward transmission of Eastern culture, in the case of mysticism", *Proceedings of the 31st international Congress of Human Sciences in Asia and North Africa, Tokyo-Kyoto 1983*, ed. Y. Tatsuro, Tokyo, 1974, pp. 378-379.

<sup>17</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> Esin, "The Turkish bakši"..., p. 102.

<sup>19</sup> Extract from Mirkhond's record in H. Yule, ed., *Cathay and the Way Thither*, London, 1915-1916, p. 272.

<sup>20</sup> J. Trimmingham, *The Sufi Orders of Islam*, Oxford, 1971, pp. 16, 51-66, 90-92.

<sup>21</sup> Useful survey by B. Matthews, "Islam as a minority religion in some Theravada states of South and South-East Asia", in R. de Koninck and J. Nadau, ed., *Ressources, problèmes et défis de l'Asie du Sud-Est*, Québec, Les Presses de l'Université Laval, 1986, pp. 43-52. Cf. S. Suksamran, *Buddhism and Political Legitimacy*, Chulalongkorn University Research Papers Series, Bangkok, no. 2, 1993.

<sup>22</sup> Abe Masao, "A dynamic unity: in religious pluralism. A proposal from the Buddhist point of view", in J. Hick and H. Askari, ed., *The Experience of Religious Diversity*, Aldershot, 1985, pp. 163-190, p. 186 Diagram II.

<sup>23</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> T. Cleary, "Buddhism and Islam", *Transactions of the International Conference of Orientalists in Japan*. No. 27, 1982, pp. 31-38.

<sup>25</sup> *ibid.*, p. 37.

<sup>26</sup> Shah, p. 363.

<sup>27</sup> *A History of the Moghuls of Central Asia*..., p. 415.

<sup>28</sup> S. Gilliat, "Islamic and Buddhist doctrines of personhood: some reflections for interfaith dialogue", *World Faiths Encounter*, 6, 1993, pp. 28-32.

<sup>29</sup> Inter-faith dialogue essays by H. Askari, *Spiritual Quest: An Inter-religious Dimension*, Pudsey 1991. See also H. Kung and J. Kuschel, ed., *A Global Ethic. The Declaration of the World's Religions*, New York, 1993; J. O'Connor, "Does the

Global Village Warrant a Global Ethic (An analysis of 'A Global Ethic, the Declaration of the 1993 Parliament of World Religions)?', *Religion*, 24, 1994, pp. 155-164.

<sup>30</sup> Badawi quote from article "Presenting God for all to see", *The Month*, Sept./Oct. 1991, cited Gilliat, p. 371.

<sup>31</sup> Sumin letter, "Message from Buddhists to the Parliament of the World Religions", *World Faiths Encounter*, Feb. 1994, pp. 53-54, written to protest against the theistic assumptions coming out from some of the Conference statements, but nevertheless suggesting other common ground.

# THE STUDY OF RELIGIONS AND INTERFAITH ENCOUNTER

PEGGY MORGAN

## *Summary*

The varied national and international events marking the centenary of the 1893 Chicago Parliament of Religions culminating in the gathering of about seven thousand five hundred people in Chicago in 1993 have involved many academics. Their presence raises afresh the issue of the relationship between the scholarly study of religions and meetings for interfaith encounter. The scholar can be seen as a participant observer in an area of religious activity of considerable interest and importance in the contemporary world. He or she can also be an advisor and consultant in the interfaith process, helping to raise and analyse questions about the balance of participants and the style of discourse being used. Interfaith activity can both change the scholar and be changed by his or her presence in a parallel way to that of the anthropologist in the field. The scholar of religion finds considerable interest in how, at interfaith gatherings, members of religions define and articulate their religion's essence, select and use teachings and scriptural passages. The reporting of meetings at which members of different faiths share ideas and sometimes worship acts as a positive balance to negative media coverage of conflict and intolerance associated with religions. But there is a need for careful and critical examination of an interfaith confessionalism which may develop at such meetings.

I began to explore some questions about the relationships between the academic study of religions and interfaith activities during the various local and international events marking the centenary of the 1893 Chicago Parliament of Religions. The resulting reflections and analyses owe a great deal to many informal conversations whilst I was writing the first draft of this paper in Bangalore and also to the discussion which took place at the annual conference of the British Association for the Study of Religions in September 1993.<sup>1</sup> The resulting paper was then given as an introductory address at the inauguration of the International Interfaith Centre at Westminster College, Oxford in December 1993 and I have included some further points resulting from the discussion on that occasion.<sup>2</sup> Since the setting for the launch of the Centre was an academic institution recognised for its expertise in the study of religions I am confident that the points that I raise have been

aired quite extensively within both communities of interest. This has been an important part of the development of my questions, for the exercise that follows is very question-based and not intended as a piece of empirical analysis but as a mapping out of areas that are in need of attention and research.

My first question involves the very attendance of academics involved in the study of religions at interfaith meetings. Are they there as members of a faith community, which many are, but which is not a requirement for research in the study of religions? If they are there as academics first and foremost what relevance do such gatherings have to their academic work? Does participation in any way tinge the academic agenda with a kind of para-theology? Does the agenda of interfaith work potentially cast a shadow over the shape of the study of religions in the same way that the concerns of an individual religion might?<sup>3</sup> Is Interfaith a kind of new religious movement? This was certainly suggested when someone attending the Chicago 1993 conference was interviewed for the BBC 1 Faith to Faith series, which began as the conference was launched, and introduced himself as an Interfaith Minister. I have since been given a good practical reason for the development of this kind of interfaith ministry, which is the many mixed faith marriages that are now a part of the world in which we live. These need appropriate pastoral support.

I was reminded once more of the need to sort out some of the issues involved in the questions I shall be asking when I registered for the Bangalore event in August and reacted rather negatively to being asked my religion. I realised that as an academic I am used to being allowed an observer's role even at a conference with a title which can be translated as religious people coming together. I had gone to give a paper for the workshop on Education for Understanding describing the contribution at Westminster College to the study of religions.<sup>4</sup> This was a fairly straightforward exercise discussing the contribution of phenomenological method within a theological and religious studies framework. For the rest of the time I was looking forward to extending my encounter with individuals of a variety of faiths and visiting religious communities, to the session on women's spirituality and to attending a workshop on the future of inter-religious dialogue led by the people such as Alan

Race, Masao Abe and Stanley Samartha. I should add that on other occasions I am asked to be involved in inter-religious dialogue specifically as a person of faith that that is a different agenda for me and not the agenda I am addressing in this paper.

At this point I should like to say that I do not consider interfaith activities to be exactly the same thing as inter-religious dialogue. True, the first statement of the World Council of Churches and Council of Churches of Britain and Ireland *Guidelines on Dialogue* says that dialogue begins when people meet each other and this shows that there is an obvious overlap.<sup>5</sup> Meeting is certainly what interfaith activity brings about, but it is in itself a broader activity than dialogue. It may involve seminars where people of different faiths present their attitudes to an issue or religious leaders have a platform to address the world. It may involve hearing one speaker, watching a cultural event or setting up an exhibition.

Some of the questions raised above about the relevance of interfaith gatherings for the academic study of religions can be answered in the following very matter of fact ways. Religious believers, as well as texts and history, are the raw material, the research field for academics. Interfaith gatherings, especially the large ones that were held in 1992,<sup>6</sup> give them in one venue the opportunity to meet a considerable number and variety of believers including religious leaders who are not normally gathered in one place. Participant observation is by now a well-tried method of study and understanding, which is part of the work of some sociologists, of anthropologists and phenomenologists.<sup>7</sup> Many academics also teach courses which analyse the phenomenon of dialogue between religion and in their case such gatherings can provide within them, if dialogue is taking place, ready-made case studies about which they teach and write.

Certainly F.M. Müller hoped that the 1893 Parliament would arouse interest in the scientific study of religions.<sup>8</sup> With increasing pressures to justify disciplines on the academic agenda and the desire to attract able students through the contemporary relevance of the study of religions, Müller's thinking is not inappropriate in 1993.<sup>9</sup> More than one person I have met at interfaith gatherings had decided to do a degree in religious studies as a result of their encounter with the range, complexity and interest of religious life

at such gatherings.<sup>10</sup> Looking at participation from the other side, many scholars, not only of religious traditions, have humane hopes that their work will bring genuine understanding, the removal of ignorance and with these some wider social and political benefits.<sup>11</sup> These hopes obviously overlap with the aspirations of people involved in inter-religious activities, and it is not, therefore, surprising if some of the same people go to interfaith as to academic conferences. Interfaith work can also be seen as the practical aspect of the knowing about, the outreach of an academic subject and just as natural a complementary activity as the desire to know more objectively which arises out of encounter. The overlap of the personal and the academic is also evidenced by the fact that involvement in both meeting and dialogue can signify a change in, and itself change, people's academic as well as personal faith positions.<sup>12</sup> Just as academics visit faith communities to find out what is happening, so members of faith communities per se are coming to academic conferences to find out what the academics are saying about religions.<sup>13</sup>

#### *The Academic as Advisor and Consultant*

Academics who are present at interfaith gatherings will bring with them an important set of questions on the proceedings. These questions may or may not have occurred to or be important for the organisers and other participants, but it is my experience that both faith communities and organisers of such events are influenced by them. This is one way that academics become involved while maintaining an entirely scholarly stance. In this capacity they can be seen as consultants to the interfaith and dialogue process.<sup>14</sup> One of their first questions is 'Who has been invited to the gathering'? and another 'Who has decided to come'? These are not necessarily the same thing. Some gatherings are the result of carefully planned invitations intended to bring key leaders together or gather a representative group of believers. The academic is then interested in *which* leaders are asked and how representative they are of the spread of religions in the world. Is the idea of individuals as representative of a religion in itself flawed? I shall address the question of representation first.

An objective analysis of the spread of religions represented needs to take into account whether people are there from all the major so-called world religions, itself a controversial term, or from the religious traditions which are considered to be important today. Is the criterion for the latter the definition one uses of a religion, its age, geographical spread, numbers or power of influence? This last set of questions leads directly to debate on the appropriate terminology for the subject and whether it is more satisfactory to broaden the field beyond the term religion into worldviews.<sup>15</sup> It has not been unusual for both adherents and scholars to deny that Buddhism, Shintoism and Confucianism, for example, should be counted as religions. In the realm of age and influence, the Bahai tradition is not very old, but it does have a wide geographical spread and outreach for its age and numbers. Many of the so-called new religious movements or alternative religious traditions have gained considerable influence by their financial capacity to organise interfaith gatherings and their commitment to travel, to addressing contemporary issues with vigour and to their intervention in high places.<sup>16</sup> Other new religious movements within the same religions have wanted no involvement at all. Why, within the new Buddhist groups, have members of Rissho Kosei Kai been so interested in interfaith encounter while Soka Gakkai followers have been slower in becoming involved? Why have the Brahma Kumaris put so many resources into interfaith activity when another international Indian-rooted movement, the International Society for Krishna Consciousness has shown relatively little interest? Scholars will want to appraise all of these elements and will in their turn be challenged by the labels that they use. Some of the groups mentioned do not like the term religion and some react against the phrase new religious movement. Scholars will want to ask whether they are seeking a wider audience for their work and wanting to suggest that they teach a spirituality beyond the division of religions, or whether they are wanting to affirm that the unity or harmony of religions is important to them. Does this then match their own doctrinal teachings? This last question is also pertinent for Christians whose doctrines are often perceived from the outside as exclusive of the salvation of others and yet who have in the UK at least provided many pioneers of interfaith activity at all levels.

Those who respond to a generally issued invitation may not be the same as those who are invited more specifically. If the gathering of a range of believers from each religion is attempted, are the delegates mainly from a religion's newer movements, in the manner mentioned above, and are the more main-line schools, countries and denominations all represented in the same numbers? If there is an in-balance is it the result of the spread of invitations, of political and economic restraints or of a community's disapproval of the gathering? All these possibilities are worthwhile subjects for academic analysis. It may be that Buddhists are tired of an inter-faith language which asserts that we are all children of the one God and which is inappropriate for their tradition. This was raised strongly by some Buddhist participants at Chicago 1993, though not at Bangalore. There was an interesting example of the opposite kind at the Mahabodhi Society in Bangalore when a bhikkhu was prepared to relate to the predominant God-language of his audience in order to communicate Buddhist concerns. An academic hearing that would want to analyse what is happening at such a meeting and whether it is an example of Buddhist *upaya kausalya* for that particular occasion<sup>17</sup> or an interesting example of developments of a more general kind in modern Buddhism.

There are further factors which influence the representational spread at a gathering of which examples are given below from the recent events. Orthodox Muslims may not be prepared to share a platform with sufis. Orthodox Christians, as also happened at Chicago, may not be prepared to sit at such a gathering with groups that they do not consider to be 'respectably' religious. To my knowledge the Bangalore celebration did not produce any dramatic reactions of this kind during its programme. But it is also the case that there were few Jews and relatively few Muslims at Bangalore. Its ethos did, however, attract many Unitarian Universalists; world economic conditions made it possible for high Japanese attendance; and the siting of the gathering in India was a help for Indian Hindus and others from Asia both geographically and economically.

Other aspects of representation are to do with individuals rather than groups. Attention is needed to whom from within the faiths are deemed to be representative by the organisers and the faiths

themselves. If the participants are mainly leaders it is almost certain that there will be many fewer women than is typical of actual membership within traditions. The 'ordinary laypeople', whether men or women, are the more typical numerically and may therefore be deemed to have the most significant voices but may or may not be well-informed enough to make a contribution. Another query linked with this is whether those who are invited think of themselves as 'representative' at all, or do they state that it is a very personal voice with which they speak, even though an important part of that voice is their religious affiliation within a cumulative tradition.<sup>18</sup> That brings us back to the question of whether the whole language of representation is flawed.

Another set of questions about the individuals who participate is also important. Whatever the range of invitations that are sent, who are the people from a religious community who *respond* to such invitations to interfaith gatherings? If an invitation arrives on the desk of the Archbishop of Canterbury for a member of the Church of England to attend, will the person who volunteers or who is chosen to go be on the periphery of the main tradition of that Church, if it is appropriate to talk of a mainline tradition? In many religious communities interfaith activity is not of central concern and those who are involved may well be on the boundaries of their tradition. For the scholar to say this is not to make a judgement of the worth of the enterprise. He or she knows that what is peripheral and the concern of pioneers in one age can be central to the next. It does mean, however, that the Anglican, for example, at an interfaith gathering, may be an unusual Anglican, but may or may not choose to identify herself in those terms.

### *Changed and Changing Participants*

Another very pertinent question to ask about the individuals involved in interfaith activity is whether they are different when in an interfaith context from when they are in their home congregations. I have heard people talking to their home communities in one theological language and using quite different categories at interfaith gatherings. Again this is not a judgemental unphenomenological comment, but just a point to be noticed and des-

cribed. It may, indeed, be a tribute to such people's sensitivity, a general example of skilful mean,<sup>19</sup> that they can speak the language that is appropriate to different contexts. There is, however, room for an analysis of how the language worlds fit together and whether there is consistency or any reflection on the part of the believer about what is taking place and why.

Whether academics are present as consultants or as researchers at an interfaith gathering they need to be aware that the community or group they are with may be changed by their involvement. Even when they are there in a research capacity the group may seek to draw them in and may assume that they are not just a neutral observer but themselves a member of a faith. One example of this may be that an English person will be assumed to be a Christian and relationships built accordingly.<sup>20</sup>

Inter-religious encounters and the changes that they bring are, of course, wider than those between individuals and through conferences. They are part of the whole social and political ambience of the world in which we live. Intensive meetings can influence and affect religious positions and bring about long-term change to the religions themselves. People's maps of belief are complex and they are shifting all the time. Interfaith encounter is one factor in those shifts, in the mutation of religions. People listen and try to explain. They adapt their language and ideas to accommodate and interest the other and take on board new perspectives. Kim Knott in her study of the role of religious studies in understanding the ethnic experience mentions inter-faith dialogue 'as one issue that might be of particular symbolic or functional significance in the reproduction of religions in a new location'.<sup>21</sup> This may well link back to an earlier point I made about the reason for the involvement of some new religious movements in inter-faith activity. It is also possible to see, perhaps in a parallel way, how over a period of time education and exchange in the Christian ecumenical movement has been effective and has changed the map of Christian self-understanding for many Christians. The encounter between different religions has aptly been called the wider ecumenism and parallel results may be seen in the future. To be present at occasions of inter-religious meeting is often to see a stage in the mutation of religions which results from their encounter, and this is certainly a fitting subject for scholarly reflection.

*Communicating the Essence*

The above comments about change effected through interfaith activities may or may not be related to another important point that arises from observing these encounters. Believers at such gatherings often try to convey the 'essence' of their religions. This is certainly an exercise that is of interest to those involved in the study of religions and is a subject that has long been on the academic agenda, not in terms of providing an answer, but asking about the nature of the exercise, the style of answers so far given and the effect of re-defining a religion in this way.<sup>22</sup> One delightful example of this phenomenon is the Dalai Lama's response on one occasion to an enquiry as to his religion. He said 'My religion is kindness'. This communicates in a term accessible to almost anyone present an attitude which completely bypasses the need for a mastery of the complexities of Buddhist history, beliefs and practices or of technical Sanskrit or Tibetan vocabulary. The scholar is bound to reflect on both the nature of the Dalai Lama's answer against the backcloth of interfaith understanding and on the more complex and technical picture it ignores.

It is also very common for participants in interfaith gatherings, including or even especially during any acts of worship, to extract from their scriptures selected beautiful passages as examples of what their tradition says about peace, tolerance, love and other appropriate topics. This is an interesting example of a use of texts but frustrating without further sharing of their original contexts, how they are part of a diversity of material including contradictory passages and their possibly different use in the communities of faith. The impetus at interfaith gatherings is to see only the best in the traditions, including their texts, the intention is always eirenic whilst the scholar is not afraid of debate and controversy in the pursuit of understanding and perceives diversity at every level of his or her enquiry. He or she also blanches at the confident proclamation that all religions teach that we are the children of one father-God, knowing, as has already been mentioned, how inappropriate that language is for Buddhists and Advaita Vedanta Hindus. Such inaccuracies often seem to abound as truth is made subservient to the intentions of unity.

*Reporting the Concerns of the Age*

One of the things that those involved in the academic study of religions often have to unravel for students is the negative imaging of both major religious traditions such as Islam and many new religious movements (in this context designated as sects or cults) in the media. More rarely do the media present pictures of people of different religious traditions celebrating, talking, praying, eating or joining together in positive ways. Photographs and reports from interfaith activities are therefore a useful antidote to media negativity. The major events of 1993 made national and international news of this positive kind.

Bangalore provided a magnificent backcloth for the practical relevance of co-operation, understanding and tolerance between religious communities. The Indian newspapers at that time were full of the debate over the religion and secularism bill and communalism was a focus for the opening address by the Governor of Karnataka, Karshad Alam Khan, and the Tarabalu Kendra leader hosting a conference visit to their community in Bangalore. Many were quoting Vivekananda as both a visionary for harmony and as a writer being used by Hindu militants for the Hinduisation of India. These factors all need to be taken into account when the Bangalore event is being analysed in its historical and social context. In the case of references to Vivekananda possible topics for Ph.D theses abound in the contemporary use that is made of his words and work. Scholarly attention to his words indicate that, although it might not be appropriate for the phenomenologist to challenge what he said about his own tradition, his words on other traditions are clearly inaccurate and insensitive, despite his assertion of unity. For example he says in the paper read on September 19th. at the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893 that 'Judaism was driven out of its place of birth by its all-conquering daughter'. It was, of course, the Romans not the Christians who expelled the Jews in CE 70, a point which he seems to acknowledge in another place. Towards the end of the same speech he calls the God of the Jews Jehovah and in the paper given on September 26th. asserts that the Jews crucified Jesus. He also calls Muslims Mohammedans in the September 19th paper.<sup>23</sup> Yet this was the

hero whose speeches were being given out by some at Bangalore 1993 in a pamphlet without any objective criticism of the use or accuracy of his work. Here is a real gap between an interfaith activity and a scholarly perspective.

The scholar will always note that ambiguities are built into the use of history at every level. Often in the past when people in interfaith circles have recalled the standing ovation given to Vivekananda at Chicago in 1893 they have almost always overlooked that there was also an ovation for Rev. Joseph Cook, the Christian minister who declared of reconciliation with God, peace and deliverance that

It is a strategic certainty that Christianity alone will effect these ends.<sup>24</sup>

What the audience seems to have applauded was not just a new liberal vision of unity and peace but passion, commitment and rhetoric, whatever the content. It was good, therefore, to hear Cook quoted alongside Vivekananda as part of the enactment of 1893 at the 1993 London and Bangalore events. This gave an accurate and not just a romantic perspective on the past.

### *Para-Theology and Confessionalism in an Interfaith Context*

It will not surprise you to know that some of the tensions I have been outlining are not new. The whole debate about the terminology of the study of religions or religious studies over against the phrase comparative religion encapsulates some of a related discussion.<sup>25</sup> I personally still reject for my academic area the old title comparative religion which emerged from a Christian confessional base and was often used to demonstrate the superiority of Christianity and therefore represented a style of Christian theology not of religious studies. The confusion of the academic and the confessional is a perennial problem with which we have to work. In 1958 at the Tokyo Ninth International Congress for the History of Religions Friedrich Heiler said

A new era will dawn upon mankind when the religions will rise to true tolerance and co-operation on behalf of mankind. To assist in preparing the way for this era is one of the finest hopes of the scientific study of religions.<sup>26</sup>

The same source comments that Zwi Werblowsky of Jerusalem

and most European scholars argued for a separation between the academic study of religions and what one could call a dialogical approach of a style in line with the above quotation. Ninian Smart recognises that the style of this is what he calls a pluralist theology.

The exchange of insights between faiths has come to have the name of dialogue. It is true that dialogue could simply be a method of exchanging information and so just be a tool of historical research: but more pregnantly it has been a particular style of pluralistic theology, a kind of cooperative spiritual exploration of truth.<sup>27</sup>

One group in Bangalore was working with a first draft of the statement on Global Ethics which was prepared for the Chicago event and which it had been hoped would be issued as a kind of official joint statement after Chicago. The undertaking of this task is an expression of widely felt concerns and a possible area of agreement between faiths and therefore of possible ways forward. To the academic looking at the document there is definitely an air of inter-faith confessionalism and para-theology in its clauses, which has made almost everyone except the initiators of the document uneasy. The unease is linked with the tone rather than the content which is ethically admirable. As Brian Bocking said very succinctly at the BASR meeting 'the language of we should, we ought and we must is a theological language'. The declaration towards a global ethic asserts

We must treat others as we wish others to treat us. We make a commitment to respect life and dignity, individuality and diversity, so that every person is treated humanely, without exception. We must have patience and acceptance. We must be able to forgive, learning from the past but never allowing ourselves to be enslaved by memories of hate.<sup>28</sup>

Within my own workshop in Bangalore, which was on Education for Understanding, a paper was circulated by Robert Traer, the secretary of the International Association for Religious Freedom, which is one of the four groups which facilitated the Bangalore celebration.<sup>29</sup> His paper is entitled *A Confessional Approach to Inter-faith Cooperation*. This is a document once more which, as its title makes very clear, belongs within the arena of a para-theology. But as with most theologies, it has its own exclusive traits and a very particular derivation and theological language which is by no means acceptable to all.

By a “confessional approach” I mean:

1. confessing our failure and the failure of other members of our religious community to respect the traditions of others,
2. affirming that we are unable by our own efforts to right these wrongs but that the love of God can nevertheless bring about healing through our efforts, and thus
3. entrusting ourselves to God and the divine work of reconciliation which is to be realised in our world through people of faith.

That is, a confessional approach to interfaith cooperation means confessing our sin, putting our faith in God, and sharing God’s love by cooperating with people of other religious traditions.<sup>30</sup>

In his title Robert Traer has, of course, made his stance quite explicit and there is therefore no indication on my part that he has a hidden agenda in any way. I am merely using his statement as a very good example of this approach within interfaith activity.

### *Conclusion*

The scholar who is experienced in the use particularly of sociological, anthropological and phenomenological skills is well prepared for many of the kinds of questions mentioned above. He or she also works with the widest possible agenda in relationship to religious traditions. As Terry Thomas put it in the BASR debate in Newcastle ‘nothing that religions do is outside the scope of the study of religions’. I might even re-phrase that to assert ‘nothing that religious people do is outside the scope of the study of religions’. All religious activity, including interfaith activity, is relevant for the scholar’s work. Where there may be tensions is in the kinds of questions asked and assumptions made by participants in interfaith work which the more analytical approach of the scholar may challenge. When people who are not members of a religion are talking about any one religion the scholar frequently has to ask ‘is that statement really true?’ or ‘what is your evidence for that statement?’ or ‘are you presenting a case which does not acknowledge diversity of opinions in this matter?’ Similarly in interfaith gatherings there may be assumptions and ways of speaking that need to be challenged if individuals and individual religions are to be properly heard. The life of the intellect and scholarly pursuit has its own integrity which can amount to a kind of spirituality. There is aspiration to rational, unprejudiced reflection, an encouragement

of tolerance and the hearing of the views of others. There is also a pursuit of truth which contains an examination of what assertions concerning truth are all about. The same liberal and humane values that allow and sustain the interfaith movement worldwide overlap to a considerable degree with the values that have allowed the academic study of religions to flourish in some of our universities in the western world. It is important to note where this style of study is not encouraged and whether interfaith activity is also diminished in those places. It is in sustaining these values that the scholar hopes for a way forward and a clear pathway for both her own investigations and the continuation of the interfaith movement.

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<sup>1</sup> Following on the first draft of this article and before it was completed there was a panel discussion in September 1993 at the BASR annual conference in Newcastle upon Tyne on the subject, which confirmed both my sense of its importance and many of the points I have made. It was chaired by Professor Ursula King who had been at the 1993 Chicago event and discussion was led by Dr Terry Thomas of the Open University and Professor Brian Bocking from the University College at Bath.

<sup>2</sup> The International Interfaith Centre is intended to provide Westminster College with a research resource and has been set up jointly with the World Congress of Faiths and the International Association for Religious Freedom. The inauguration meeting gathered together over 100 academics and religious leaders. The Centre's Conference in April 1994 focuses once more on this area. For further information contact Peggy Morgan, Westminster College, Oxford OX2 9AT UK.

<sup>3</sup> I am using the terms in the same way as Professor Michael Pye in his inaugural lecture at the University of Lancaster in May 1992 which was entitled '*Religion: Shape and Shadow*', published in NUMEN XLI (1), 1994, pp. 51-75.

<sup>4</sup> The proceedings of the conference are published in C. and D. Storey eds. *Visions of an Interfaith Future*, International Interfaith Centre 1994, pp. 113-119.

<sup>5</sup> *Guidelines on Dialogue with People of Living Faiths and Ideologies*, WCC 1979, and *In Good Faith*, CCBI 1991.

<sup>6</sup> There were over 600 delegates at Bangalore and over 2,000 people involved in the wider cultural activities and visits to religious communities in the area. The Chicago event involved 7,500 members.

<sup>7</sup> There is a good exploration of this in the work of Kim Knott. See the introduction to *Hinduism in Leeds*, 1986, and *The Role of Religious Studies in Understanding the Ethnic Experience*, 1992, both published by the Community Religions Project, Department of Theology and Religious Studies, University of Leeds UK.

<sup>8</sup> See his and other contributions in J.H. Barrows (ed.), *The World's Parliament of Religions*, 2 vols., New York 1893, vol. 1 p. 15.

<sup>9</sup> The terminology has, of course, diversified, as the recent discussions of the committee of the IAHHR about its title in different languages has shown. We would now talk about Religious Studies or the Study of Religions with its component disciplines of History, Phenomenology, Anthropology, Sociology and Psychology of Religions, to name only a selection of the contributory methods.

<sup>10</sup> These people do not wish to be named in this paper but are in their twenties and members of both Christian denominations and new religious movements. They have begun formal study both on part-time and full-time courses.

<sup>11</sup> It has become increasingly obvious in the last decades how relevant the study of religions is as part of professional education for members of the health services, the police force etc. and many people teaching the subject academically have been drawn into that form of education. Examples of this have been the two important conferences on death and dying and religious traditions at the University of Derby UK in April 1993 and 1994 and the planning of a qualification in the area of professional ethics at my own institution.

<sup>12</sup> This seems to be true especially in the area of Christian theological approaches to other religions. See, for example, the autobiographical material in John Hick, *God Has Many Names*, Philadelphia 1982. Another interesting example is in the work of Paul Tillich towards the end of his life. See P. Tillich, *The Encounter of Religions and Quasi Religions*, ed. Terry Thomas, Edwin Mellen Press 1990. Diana Eck has also reflected on her own spiritual pilgrimage in *Encountering God*, Beacon Press 1993.

<sup>13</sup> An example of this is the attendance of the manager and librarian of the Soka Gakkai Institute of Oriental Philosophy's European Centre and members of the Brahma Kumaris at conferences at King's College, London and the 1993 British Association for the Study of Religions in Newcastle.

<sup>14</sup> The term consultants was used by Brian Bocking in the debate at the British Association for the Study of Religions referred to in footnote 1 of this article.

<sup>15</sup> This is argued by N. Smart especially in *Worldviews*, Scribners 1983, and in his use of the phrase worldview analysis.

<sup>16</sup> Possible examples of this are the Unification Church who have organised many interfaith gatherings, the Buddhist group Risho Kosei Kai who send large delegates to international conferences and The Brahma Kumaris who have a high profile at the UN and are addressing issues of global threat and personal stress. They tend to disown the word religion and their categorisation as a new religious movement of Hinduism, preferring to stress their general spiritual path. See the as yet unpublished paper by Dr Frank Whaling, New College, Edinburgh for the 1993 annual day conference on the Sanskrit Tradition in The Modern World convened by Dr Dermot Killingley at the University at Newcastle-upon-Tyne UK.

<sup>17</sup> For a full investigation of upaya kausalya see M. Pye, *Skilful Means*, Duckworth 1978. The term has also been taken up by J. Hick in a chapter of that title in his *Disputed Questions*, Macmillan 1993.

<sup>18</sup> This is the language so well explored by W. Cantwell Smith especially in *The Meaning and End of Religion*, Harper & Row 1962.

<sup>19</sup> M. Pye 1978 *op. cit.*

<sup>20</sup> This was raised for discussion from his own experience by Professor Michael Pye at the BASR debate referred to in footnote 1.

<sup>21</sup> K. Knott, *The Role of Religious Studies in Understanding the Ethnic Experience*,

Community Religions Project, Department of Theology and Religious Studies, University of Leeds UK 1992, p. 21.

<sup>22</sup> The classical attempts to do this for the Christian tradition lie in the work of Harnack translated into English in 1901 as *What is Christianity?* Harper Torchbook edition 1957, and in E. Troeltsch, *Writings on Theology and Religion*, tr. By R. Morgan and M. Pye, Duckworth 1977. It is overviewed in S. Sykes, *The Identity of Christianity*, SPCK 1984. The classic Jewish attempt is in L. Baeck, *The Essence of Judaism*, first published in 1922, Schocken edition 1948. Work on the essence of Buddhism is analysed by M. Pye in R. Morgan and M. Pye (eds.), *The Cardinal Meaning*, Mouton 1973.

<sup>23</sup> Vivekananda's addresses at the 1893 Parliament are in volume 1 of the *Complete Works of Vivekananda*, Advaita Ashrama, 1st. ed. 1967, pp. 1-24. A pamphlet of these key speeches was distributed free of charge at Bangalore.

<sup>24</sup> The speeches, messages and addresses of the conference are collected in J.H. Barrows ed. *op. cit.*

<sup>25</sup> The most comprehensive history of the subject is to be found in E. Sharpe, *Comparative Religion*, Duckworth 1975, 2nd. ed. 1991.

<sup>26</sup> Quoted in F. Whaling (ed.), *Contemporary Approaches to the Study of Religion*, Vol. 1, Mouton 1985, p. 182.

<sup>27</sup> *ibid.* p. 367.

<sup>28</sup> The text of the *Declaration Towards a Global Ethic* was printed in *World Faiths Insight* No. 6 Nov. 1933. See also H. Küng & K.-J. Kuschel (eds.), *A global ethic: The Declaration of the Parliament of the World's Religions*, SCM 1993.

<sup>29</sup> These were the International Association for Religious Freedom (IARF), the World Congress of Faiths (WCF), The International Association for Religions and Peace (IARP) and the Temple of Understanding.

<sup>30</sup> See C. and D. Storey eds. *op. cit.* pp. 318-330.

# THE IMAGES OF IMMORTALS AND EMINENT MONKS: RELIGIOUS MENTALITY IN EARLY MEDIEVAL CHINA (4-6 c. A.D.)

MU-CHOU POO

## *Summary*

This study seeks to investigate the religious mentality in early Medieval China. By comparing two types of characters, i.e., the immortals of the Taoist tradition, and the eminent monks of the Buddhist religion, we try to discover the special nature of both these types of characters, and to delineate their similarities as well as differences. Our analysis shows that the stories about the immortals and the eminent monks reflected a common mentality: a psychological need for an easy way to salvation; an attempt to control supernatural forces; an urge for solutions to some earthly problems concerning life and death. This common mentality, moreover, had existed among the Chinese people before the advancement of Buddhism and Taoism at the end of the Han dynasty, and continues to exist after the establishment of both religions. The successful development of Buddhism and Taoism, especially among the common people, should be seen not merely as the triumph of their teachings, but as the successful incorporation of this basic religious mentality. It was, therefore, an underlying bridge that logically connected the development of Chinese religious tradition from the pre-Buddhist and pre-Taoist era to the later period. It could also serve as one of the keys to the understanding of the formation and shape of popular religion in China in the subsequent era.

## *1. Introduction*

The formation of a historical religion can usually be studied by analyzing the political, social, economical, and intellectual background of the society from which it arose. Indeed, worldly disasters caused by the disorder and disintegration of social and moral structures can often lead to the development of new religions. The rise of the mystery religions that emphasized personal salvation during the Hellenistic period, for example, was explained as due to the disintegration of the city states system, the rise of empires, the hardship of the life of people, and the disappearance of the old civic religion that was part of the life of city states.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, discussions of the religious development of China in the era after the disintegration of the Han dynasty in the late second century A.D. were

focused on two major factors: the various social and economic problems, including wars and epidemics, that were caused by political disorder on the one hand, and the decline of the once dominating Confucian thought and the rise of the Taoist, Nihilist, and other intellectual trends on the other. The first factor gave rise to the need of salvation for the common people, and the second factor urged the development of skepticism and extremism among the intellectuals.<sup>2</sup>

Concerning the establishment of Buddhism in China, therefore, it is often said that the turbulent situation of Chinese society since the end of the Eastern Han dynasty had created a perfect environment for the spread of a religion that offered the common folk a way out of the seemingly endless misery of life.<sup>3</sup> Others suggested that the early proponents of Buddhism attracted Chinese intellectuals by borrowing, deliberately or inevitably, some of the Chinese concepts, especially those of Taoist literature, and thus made it easier for the Chinese to accept Buddhist ideas in Chinese guise.<sup>4</sup>

While these observations may all be valid in part, one factor remains to be stressed. This is the fact that, in an ancient society, the vicissitudes of ordinary life from birth to death and the interplay between natural and human environment already formed a sufficient background for the need and growth of religious beliefs. The motivations for the acceptance and development of a new religion (or religions) can be found not only in people's response to some grave social or intellectual crisis, but also in a stable and prosperous society.<sup>5</sup> By studying some of the more "ordinary" factors, we may be able to reach the basic stratum of the religious mentality of the people.<sup>6</sup>

Ancient Chinese people, of course, were not without various indigenous beliefs that can be regarded as reflecting "ordinary" religious mentality, as scholars have already noticed.<sup>7</sup> For the period under our concern, however, a view of the religious mentality of the commoners, whose ideas or inspirations might not have direct relationship with the contemporary politics or even intellectual trends, was not well represented in the existing scholarly literature due to the paucity of documentation.<sup>8</sup>

Without a proper understanding of this subject, however, it would be difficult to pin down the reasons why Buddhism and

Taoism could spread successfully among Chinese people in the later centuries, and why the so-called popular religion in modern China assumed its present shape. It is a challenging task, because almost all contemporary documents are written by and for the elite. We are immediately confronted with the familiar problem of how to understand "popular culture" through texts that are basically the product of "elites."

In terms of material evidence, archaeological discoveries have demonstrated that the Han elites often possessed funerary equipments that were similar, although of better quality, to those of the common people. Such funerary equipments, furthermore, often represented religious ideas of non-Confucian origin and betrayed the popular mentality of the tomb owners.<sup>9</sup> One may doubt, of course, whether or not the owners of these tombs could be considered as "Confucianist." Yet if Confucian values belonged mainly to the elite class, represented by the richer tombs, there is good reason to believe that many of the so-called Confucian elites were not without the influence of the popular religious mentality of their time.<sup>10</sup> Thus it is possible to approach popular religion through elite culture. In recent anthropological discussions on Chinese religion, scholars have gradually come to the understanding that there was, or is, no simple division between "elite" and "popular" culture, or "great" and "little" traditions in Chinese society and religion. The mutual influence and interactions between the "upper" and "lower" strata of culture were very complex problems that should be studied carefully.<sup>11</sup> However, these works have not yet made a serious impact on ancient China study in general. Consequently the notion of popular religion in the context of Ancient Chinese history still needs articulation in depth.<sup>12</sup>

These problems notwithstanding, it is still possible to approach the religious world of the common people through the examination of contemporary texts. In the present study, two texts, representing respectively the Taoist religion and Buddhism in early medieval China, have been chosen. One is the *Biographies of the Immortals* (*Shen hsien chuan*, henceforth *SHC*), commonly attributed to one of the greatest founders of religious Taoism, Ko Hung (c. A.D. 280-340).<sup>13</sup> The other is the *Biographies of the Eminent Monks* (*Kao seng*

*chuan*, henceforth *KSC*) by Hui Chiao (A.D. 496-554), himself a monk of lesser eminence in the Liang Dynasty.<sup>14</sup> These two works are chosen not because they were meant to be representations of the religious mentality of the common people, since they were clearly written by and for the elite (or literati) class.<sup>15</sup> They are, in fact, important texts in the traditions of Taoism and Buddhism respectively. Yet since immortals and eminent monks were the most important ideal personalities in the two religious traditions, an analysis of their collective characteristics should reveal some of the reasons why they were admired by their followers. We shall first make some observations on the characteristics of their imageries, especially on their social background, their motives for searching for Tao or revelation, their interactions with society, and the prerequisites for achieving their goals. Through a comparison of these characteristics, we shall try to extract some common elements that can be attributed to a basic religious mentality that existed among both Taoist and Buddhist devotees. Our discussion is by necessity limited in scope. The purpose of this article is only to present a possible direction of research, and to see if or not one small corner of the religious world of the common folks could come to light.<sup>16</sup>

A few words about the authors and sources of these works is necessary before we start our investigation. According to Ko Hung himself, he wrote a *SHC* in ten *chüan*.<sup>17</sup> P'ei Sung-chih quoted some paragraphs from *SHC* in his annotation to *San Kuo Chih* and said that it was written by Ko Hung, as "his book and essays are widely known."<sup>18</sup> T'ao Hung-ching, the famous Taoist theorist of the fifth century, was said to have read *SHC* and was deeply influenced by it.<sup>19</sup> Thus at least by the fifth century the *SHC* was already a famous work. According to the "preface" in the existing text of the *SHC*, the author claimed that his motive for writing this book was to answer the question: "Were there really people who became immortals in ancient time?" The purpose of this book, obviously, was to prove the existence of the immortals.

The way Ko Hung composed his work, according to this "preface," was to "copy and collect from the 'classic of the immortals,' the 'prescriptions for dietary practices,' and the works of numerous scholars stories about the ancient immortals, in addition to what the former masters had mentioned and the erudite scholars had dis-

cussed.” It is therefore a work of collected stories. These stories although surely edited by Ko Hung, ought nevertheless to have contained some ideas about the immortals prevalent in the contemporary society, which may not be totally consistent with Ko Hung’s own ideas.<sup>20</sup>

The attitude of Hui Chiao in compiling the *Biographies of the Eminent Monks* sounds even more scholarly in that he intended to write a collected biography for the important monks since the introduction of Buddhism into China till his time. During his work, he consulted numerous works by early Buddhist monks, official historians, and private scholars, in addition to personal interviews with some old and knowledgeable literati.<sup>21</sup> It is therefore reasonable to assume that these works are basically compilations of existing stories about immortals and eminent monks. Personal factors or ideologies might have exerted some influence on the selection of the material and the style of narration, yet by and large there were still some basic facts that were not easily altered by the compilers.<sup>22</sup> This assumption, of course, is vital to the following discussion.

## 2. *The Characteristics of the Immortals*

The nature of the immortals is often discussed in the field of Taoist Studies.<sup>23</sup> The main efforts, however, have been concentrated on the explication of the “physical nature” of the immortals and their domain, the ways to achieve immortality through special exercise and medicine, or the pseudo-alchemic experiments of Taoist devotees.<sup>24</sup> Attention has rarely been paid to the social status of the immortals before they reached immortality, nor to the social implications of their deeds after they reached immortality. This is to say, the images of the immortals in the mind of the people have not been investigated through an observation of the interactions between the immortals and society. In the following pages, therefore, we shall try to ameliorate this situation by examining the social background of the immortals, the reasons for their search for immortality, the pre-conditions for achieving immortality, and the relationship between the deeds of the immortals and society.

(2.1) Social status of the immortality seekers

What was the social status of these people before they reached immortality? Eighteen out of some eighty-four immortals recorded in the *SHC* could be identified as belonging to the scholar-official or literati class. They include such famous persons as Mo-tzu, the founder of Moism, King of Huai-nan, the proponent of Taoism in early Western Han Dynasty, and Chang Tao-ling, the founder of Taoism in Szechuan at the end of Eastern Han Dynasty.<sup>25</sup> A few others are presented as "common people," such as a shepherd, a poor woodcutter, or simply an illiterate person.<sup>26</sup> Most of the immortals, however, are only known by their names, sometimes their home town, while nothing is said about their educational background or social status. These could be further divided into two groups. One group consists of some ancient, legendary or mythological figures such as P'eng-tsu, Kuang-cheng-tzu, or Jo-shih,<sup>27</sup> who are described as "ancient immortals." The other group seems to be "real" people closer to the world of the author.

Judging from the background of the immortals as recorded in the *SHC*, the fact that high social or intellectual background are not strongly represented suggests that it is probably not a required qualification for one to achieve immortality. This observation can be corroborated by a passage in *Pao P'u Tzu*, another important work by Ko Hung:

In searching for longevity and cultivating the ultimate true way, the secret lies in one's determination, not in one's wealth and power.<sup>28</sup> ... Therefore those who attained immortality in ancient times were mostly poor, without power and position.<sup>29</sup>

This idea was, furthermore, probably not Ko Hung's own, but was shared by many, as what was preserved in the biographies ought to reflect what people considered important in representing the immortals.

(2.2) The driving force for immortality seeking

What are the reasons that prompted these people to seek for a deathless life in the first place? In the stories of about nine immortals, the reasons are variously given as remorse over the brevity of the mortal life, the vanity of wealth and power, or the unsatisfactory answer given to these problems by Confucian learning.<sup>30</sup>

About another ten biographies merely mention that they pursued longevity simply because they had wished it.<sup>31</sup> However, in the rest of the biographies, which represent the large majority, no explanations are given at all concerning the inspirations for their search for immortality.

This situation suggests that the reasons for their search for immortality are not considered indispensable information in their biographies either. It might be a reflection of a common assumption that the reasons for one's craving for immortality are self-evident, or that the activity of immortality-seeking is a common phenomenon in society so that no explanations are necessary. What people felt interesting, instead, was other information that had more direct relationship with the readers or story-listeners such as the necessary conditions for achieving immortality, various methods of obtaining longevity, and the deeds of the immortals.

### (2.3) Conditions for achieving immortality

Two kinds of prerequisites for achieving immortality can be ascertained in the *SHC*. There are, in the first place, moral conditions, which include exceptional faith, perseverance, as well as a virtuous character. As the process of search for immortality often required a long period of examination, it was natural that the person who intended to obtain immortality was expected to demonstrate exceptional faith in his pursuance. One story has it that a person who wanted to seek immortality was asked by an immortal to eat excrement. Since he hesitated to do such an abominable thing, he did not pass the test.<sup>32</sup> In another story, an immortal-master wanted to test the faith of his disciples in the art of producing longevity elixir by asking them to take a kind of drug that shall cause temporary death. He himself took the drug first and died immediately. One of his disciples who had greater faith in him followed suit and dropped dead. The remaining two disciples, seeing that the dead seemed to have no sign of coming to life, decided to give up. In the end, of course, only the one who had greater faith achieved his goal and became immortal.<sup>33</sup>

In some other cases, personal integrity played a part in the search for immortality. A certain shepherd was chosen by a Taoist priest and was taught the art of obtaining immortality mainly because the

Taoist priest considered that he was a nice and humble person.<sup>34</sup>

Such kind of sound personal integrity, surprisingly, does not seem to have been an important ingredient in the stories about the immortals in *SHC* in general. Instead, quite a number of characters reached immortality not due to their faith or perseverance, but because of some good fortune or physiognomic feature. In the biography of Yen Ch'ing, for example, it is said that Yen's family was poor, and he used to burn charcoal in the mountains. One day he met an immortal who said to him: "Your bone-feature is that of an immortal," and gave him a scroll, which contained the secret to immortality. He therefore followed the instructions and became an immortal.<sup>35</sup> This and many other similar stories illustrate that the personal qualifications for achieving immortality were mainly conditions outside of one's own control.

This observation seems to contradict some of Ko Hung's words in *Pao P'u Tzu*. Indeed, Ko Hung emphasized the importance of moral behavior for the immortality-seeker:

Anyone who intends to seek immortality should base his effort on loyalty, filial piety, friendliness, obedience, humanity, and trustworthiness. Those who do not tend to the cultivation of the virtues but only concentrate on the magical methods will not be able to achieve immortality in the end.<sup>36</sup>

Seeing from another angle, Ko Hung's warning could be viewed as a mirror of the contemporary situation that, in the mind of the common folks, the way to immortality lay not in the cultivation of virtue but in obtaining some magical drug or charm. As a matter of fact, in the "Inner Chapters" of *Pao P'u Tzu* where Ko Hung further developed his ideas, what he articulated in detail are exactly various physical and material methods, which hardly have any direct relationship with personal virtue. For example, in one passage Ko Hung states:

One who wishes to seek immortality should acquire the essential method. The essential method is to preserve vital essence and perform the circulation of the breath, and it will be enough to take one dose of the crucial medicine.<sup>37</sup>

This paragraph indicates that the factor of moral integrity was relatively unimportant for immortality in his view. This is essentially the same as what is found in the biographies of the immortals discussed above.

In addition to the personal integrity that qualifies a person for immortality, there are some other non-moral conditions which are also vital to the practitioners. These, in addition to good physiognomical features already mentioned, include various dietary instructions, physical exercises, divine elixir, as well as secret scriptures, which, in fact, are the most common information contained in the biographies of the immortals. Many of these biographies contain mainly descriptions of how the would-be-immortals took the elixir, follow the method of exercise, or recite the divine scriptures, often with the help of an immortal. As these techniques have already been sufficiently studied, I shall not go into any further detail here.<sup>38</sup>

To sum up the two kinds of prerequisites for obtaining immortality that are reflected in *SHC*, we can say that although personal virtue and integrity are considered positive conditions, they are not as prominent as those non-moral conditions. Furthermore, the nature of the so-called personal virtue or integrity as found in *SHC* is more a kind of value-free characteristics rather than moral behavior. For fervent faith or strong will in undertaking difficult tasks only prove one's determination, not moral quality.

#### (2.4) The deeds of the immortals

The immortals were attractive to people's imaginations partly because of their mystical behavior, as they usually lived in the mountains and were rarely seen by ordinary people. More important, however, are the superhuman or magical powers they possessed. Some of these powers, such as flying on clouds, metamorphosis, disappearing at will, or commanding the ghosts, are represented in the biographies of the immortals. These special abilities themselves usually have nothing to do with the welfare of the ordinary people except to show that the immortals were quite different from the mortals.

Yet despite of the differences, the immortals were not entirely alienated from the secular world. Their ideas and behavior were deeply rooted in this world, as they were once mortals also. In connection with this are some other kinds of abilities that they possessed, such as the ability to raise the dead, to cure the sick, to help the poor, to foretell the future, and to teach the method of obtaining

immortality.<sup>39</sup> And it is precisely because of this relationship with the secular world that they received the veneration, admiration, and devotion of the people. For the common people not only hoped that their sufferings could be alleviated by the immortals, but that they themselves could also become immortals. When we examine the relations of the immortals with society, only a few are described as minding their own business without any contact with the secular world. Forty-seven, that is, more than half, of the eighty-six biographies in *SHC* contain stories concerning the interactions of the immortals with common folks in one way or another.

Reviewing the characteristics of the immortals recorded in the *SHC*, one could see that the descriptions of the magical powers of the immortals, the conditions by which immortals reached their status, and the relationship between immortals and the common people are the best represented elements concerning the image of immortals. These, therefore, are the basic references for our search for the religious mentality of the common people. It is from these observations that we come to the conclusion that the fundamental idea concerning the possibility of achieving immortality, as reflected in *SHC*, is that of an optimistic, non-moral, and materialistic one.<sup>40</sup>

### *3. The Characteristics of the Eminent Monks*

#### (3.1) Personal background

Of all the 257 monks in the *Biographies of the Eminent Monks*, only about 23 are known to have come from the middle to upper stratum of society, and about 10 are known to have come from poor or peasant background. Most of the monks, therefore, are of unknown social origin. However, judging from the descriptions of their characters, many must have come from the literati class, as they were in general familiar with the Chinese classics or Buddhist scriptures, and had cultivated fine intellectual taste and graceful manners.<sup>41</sup> Sometimes the expressions concerning their character sound even like those depicting the famous literati in the *Shih-shuo hsin-yü*, which, normally, are not suitable for people with non-literati background. Even if this more literary image of the monks might have been embellished by the author Hui Chiao,<sup>42</sup> the fact that it

was so written is still a reflection of the contemporary ideal, that the eminent monks were no less culturally refined than the members of the literati class.

These monks, furthermore, had a more intimate relationship with the lay world. More than half of them were often the guests or friends of the members of the upper echelon of society. Quite a number of the monks participated in the more important ruling circles of the Southern and Northern dynasties.<sup>43</sup> More than one third of the monks, furthermore, were active mainly in the countryside, spreading the Buddhist message to the people. Only a handful of them were hermits who sought a solitary life. As a whole, their relationship with the lay world seems more intimate than what the immortals had demonstrated.

### (3.2) Reasons for devotion

As for the reasons why these monks decided to abandon their lay life and seek for illumination in the Buddhist teachings, there are only a handful of biographies in which this question is addressed. A few of them expressed a deep disenchantment over the unpredictability of life.<sup>44</sup> Others, after searching through secular literature, discovered that only the Buddhist scriptures offered them the true passage to enlightenment.<sup>45</sup> Several examples, however, reveal no connection with such intellectual reflections. Some might have been converted to Buddhism due to personal tragedy,<sup>46</sup> some due to practical needs,<sup>47</sup> and some were persuaded of the supremacy of Buddhism, seeing that the Buddhist monks possessed superior magical power than the shamans.<sup>48</sup> And it is particularly worth noticing that, in the entire *KSC*, only one example is found, in which the reason for a monk's conversion to Buddhism was his experience with the cruelty of war.<sup>49</sup>

If we consider the age by which the monks decided to become a Buddhist disciple, at least 91, or about one third, of them were under eighteen, including those referred to in their biographies as a "minor." When this factor is taken into account together with their social background and the reasons for their abandoning the secular life, it is quite suggestive that many of the monks in the *KSC* made their decisions probably not because they had experienced the evils of the world or the vanity of life, for that usually would come

with a more mature age, but out of intellectual curiosity. Having said this, we should also remember that in most of the biographies no information are given concerning the initial drive that prompted the monks to devote themselves to the way of Buddhism.

(3.3) The deeds of the eminent monks

When compiling the monks' biographies, Hui Chiao divided them into ten categories according to their particular accomplishments.<sup>50</sup> For our discussion, however, it suffice to divide them into two groups. The first includes monks whose accomplishments were directly related to the teaching or propagation of Buddhist scriptures. The second includes monks who possessed unusual abilities or magical powers. It is this second group of monks who deserve our attention in the present context. It should be made clear, however, that it is often possible for a monk to qualify for both groups.

Already in the category of "theurgists", Hui Chiao collected twenty biographies, which include stories about thirty monks who possessed various supernatural powers such as foretelling future events, praying for rain, manipulating ghosts and spirits, making oneself disappear and reappear, mysterious disappearance after death, moving hundreds of miles in one day, taming wild animals, or curing diseases.<sup>51</sup> These supernatural powers are basically the same as those possessed by the immortals in the *SHC*. Yet if we examine the entire *KSC*, as many as 86, or one-third, out of 257 monks, possessed such supernatural powers. Thus the supernatural abilities of the monks were important elements in their biographies. This reflects not only what the monks might have presented themselves to be, or what the author would like the monks to be represented, but, more importantly, what the images of the monks in the eyes of the people were. It also reflected that the world people lived in was still a world full of mysterious powers and spirits. Those who could deal with these powers were the ones that would secure the trust of the people. Even the monks could not alienate themselves from this reality. After relating the stories about the "theurgists", Hui Chiao defended the supernatural powers of the monks: "The use of the divine methods was to subdue the powerful, to destroy the uncouth, to curb the fierce, and to solve

disputes.<sup>52</sup> He did not deny the existence of ghosts and spirits,<sup>53</sup> nor the magical powers of the Taoists, only refuted the propriety of their art:

As for those who showed off their magical skill, using evil methods to confuse the people, depending on divine drugs to fly high, taking rare medicinal plants to reach longevity, what was the difference between them and those cranes crowing in the cloud, dogs barking in the sky, snakes and swans undying, turtles living for thousands of years?<sup>54</sup>

The supernatural powers of the monks, just as that of the immortals, were the products of their time and the reflections of a common religious mentality.

#### 4. *Religious Mentality as Seen through SHC and KSC*

There is no doubt that both the *SHC* and the *KSC* were written for a literary audience. Both intended to preserve the stories of those who had achieved the ideal in their religious traditions. Moreover, the ultimate purpose of these works was not only to preserve some stories, but also to propagate their respective religious tenets to the people through the help of literary adepts. In this regard, they are similar to the hagiographies of the West since the middle ages.<sup>55</sup> On the other hand, since before they were incorporated into the *Biographies* the stories were already circulating in society in written form or by oral transmission, there must have existed some elements in these stories, other than the explication of religious tenets, that could attract the enthusiasm of the people. It is reasonable to assume, therefore, that the biographies of the immortals and the eminent monks could reflect the religious mentality of the commoners to a certain extent.

From the characteristics of immortals that are emphasized in the *SHC*, such as the various kinds of supernatural powers, the ability of remaining young physically, and above all longevity, a desire to completely overturn the limitations of human existence, a desire to escape from the control of age, sickness, and death, is clearly expressed. It is said that one of the basic characteristics of religious beliefs is for the devotee to gain a new life through his faith. This new life could be cut off completely from the earthly life, as it is held by the Christian faith in that one shall gain an eternal life after

one's death. It could also be a continuation and unlimited extension of the earthly life, a life appreciated by the Taoist religion. In addition to this, the Taoist mentality included some other elements. When trying to transcend the physical limitations, Taoist devotees held a kind of non-moral, materialistic or mechanical, and optimistic attitude. It is true that in order to reach their goal, they had to undertake various procedures including dietary control, physical exercise, meditation, and searching for the recipes of the elixir, which could have been an arduous task. Yet in immortals' biographies, the difficult nature of this process is not particularly emphasized, and it is said that "if one only desires, one can gain the true way."<sup>56</sup> Personal efforts are appreciated, yet not as much as luck, favorable physiognomic feature, or some non-moral factors such as finding the correct medicine, or the willing help of another immortal.

Although we have been arguing that this religious mentality is not the reflection of merely the personal predilection of the author of *SHC*, nor of the elite Taoist adepts, but of a wider population, some other evidence can still be adduced to further strengthen this point. In the *History (Shih Chi)* by Ssu-ma ch'ien, the idea of immortality, which appeared as early as the end of the Warring States Period (3rd c. B.C.) and which the famous or infamous emperors Ch'in Shih-huang (The First Emperor of Ch'in, 248-210 B.C.) and Han Wu-ti (Emperor Wu of Han, 141-87 B.C.) had incessantly sought for, was not connected with any obvious moral teaching. In the *Lieh Hsien Chuan*, another collection of the stories of immortals ascribed to Liu Hsiang in the first century B.C., no particular moral accomplishments are observed in the lives of the immortals.<sup>57</sup> At the end of the Han dynasty in the late 2nd century A.D., the Five Pecks of Rice Sect founded by the Taoist Master Chang Tao-ling required its adepts to stay in a quiet room to repent for their wrong doings if they were caught by sickness. Yet this seemingly moral element in the early Taoist religion was not connected with the way to immortality.<sup>58</sup> One of the earliest Taoist scriptures the *T'ai P'ing Ching*,<sup>59</sup> contains various moral advice to its readers, yet only rarely did these have to do with immortality.<sup>60</sup> This is of course not to deny that there were moral teachings in the Taoist religion. However, it is revealing that even Ko Hung claimed in

*Pao P'u Tzu*, that "if one wishes to become an earth-immortal (i.e. an immortal who does not ascend to Heaven), he should establish three hundred benevolent deeds; if one wishes to become a heaven-immortal, he should establish one thousand and two hundred benevolent deeds."<sup>61</sup> This idea was still imbued with a kind of mentality that conceived the immortalization process as mechanical accumulation of a certain amount of benevolent deeds. During the Southern and Northern dynasties period, some evidence shows that good fortune was still a major factor for someone who had gained the secret of immortality.<sup>62</sup>

The personal background, especially political and social status, was relatively unimportant for achieving immortality. This indicates a "democratic" conception that, given the right opportunity, anyone can become an immortal. It also suggests that, when Ko Hung was compiling the *SHC*, the belief in immortality was already widespread. This corroborates the fact that, after the suppression by the Wei and Western Chin regimes, Taoism gradually began to spread throughout China again.<sup>63</sup> During the Eastern Chin and the Southern Dynasty period, as a response to the prevalent idea of hereditary social class, Taoism also began to construct a class system in the world of immortals. Yet the possibility for any commoner to become immortal was never ruled out.<sup>64</sup>

As for the relatively low interest in the biographies concerning the driving forces for the Taoist adepts in seeking for immortality, it may have reflected an attitude that the existence of the immortals was a common fact in society, so that no particular attention was paid to the questions such as why someone wanted to seek for immortality, or if it was possible at all for a person to reach immortality. This common attitude can be corroborated by evidence outside of the *SHC*. We have mentioned the immortality seeking Ch'in Shih-huang and Han Wu-ti. The stories about the *fang-shih*, a group of men skilled in divination and magic art who were entrusted by the emperors as well as commoners, also abound with aspirations to immortality.<sup>65</sup> One of the popular inscriptions on the bronze mirrors of the Han period, for another example, mentions the world of the immortals.<sup>66</sup> The poets of the Wei-chin period, furthermore, often expressed their longing for the world of the immortals, reflecting a widespread idea of immortality in society.<sup>67</sup> In

*The History of Chin (Chin Shu)*, the author commented at the end of the "Biographies of people with talents," which is a collection of the stories of some people with unusual or magical power, that "although these people were criticized as being demonic, they nevertheless had some contributions to the world."<sup>68</sup> It is obvious that the author did not really doubt the truth of their having magical power, although, as a Confucian scholar, he can not approve their activities wholeheartedly.

The abode of the immortals, which was often in heaven or in the mountains, was not a major focus for the biographies either. What they concerned was mainly the activities of immortals in relation to this world. In other words, what interested the people was how one could reach immortality through contacts with the immortals.

To sum up the religious mentality as reflected in *SHC*, one sees a kind of attitude which, though temporarily disappointed with the secular world and the brevity of human life, was nevertheless rather optimistic about the possibility of reaching immortality. This optimistic mentality was expressed, on the one hand, by the idea that everyone was entitled to immortality, and, on the other hand, through the assumption that it was not really too difficult to obtain immortality. This mentality, furthermore, was also reflected in other texts discussed above.

Compared with *SHC*, what *KSC* has reflected concerning the religious mentality of the common people was more limited. This is no doubt due to the selection of the characters who, as Hui Chiao made it clear already, were "eminent but not famous" monks, and who were from a narrower circle of the Buddhist adepts. In spite of this limitation, some features of the religious mentality of the common folks can still be extracted from the *KSC*.

It has been noticed that very few of the monks are from the lower stratum of society, and their motivations for seeking Buddhist enlightenment rarely originated from a need to solve personal distress caused by war and social injustice. Thus the thesis that the spread of Buddhism in China was due to the fact that people sought for spiritual salvation from their sufferings caused by the political and social upheaval after the fall of the Han needs reassessment in view of the material in the *KSC*. For the common people, joining the Buddhist order often meant some economic benefits that could

alleviate hardship in life;<sup>69</sup> for the eminent monks, the curiosity for spiritual enlightenment weighted more than any concerns for practical living condition. Both are not quite compatible with the idea that spiritual crisis caused by historical conditions would inevitably lead to religious conversion.

Most strikingly, the descriptions of the supernatural power of the monks, and the stories about conversions based on witnessing the display of magical powers, are quite similar to those found in the biographies of the immortals. The Buddhist teaching, of course, did not deny human mortality. Yet somehow the idea of ascending to heaven, revival after death, disappearance of the body after death, or some kind of unusual situation should happen to the body of the deceased, still loomed large in the stories connected with the monks. This shows that, in the mind of the people, a certain unusual and even mysterious power came naturally with someone who has supposedly reached the goal in the pursuance of his faith.

Even if we discount the supernatural powers, some of the deeds of the eminent monks revealed another aspect of the mentality of the Buddhist devotees. These are the abilities to cure the sick and to help the poor. Again, similar to the immortals, these kinds of abilities were what really made the monks attractive to the common folks. It is not surprising, though, for the study of medicine had some solid basis in both Taoism and Buddhism.<sup>70</sup>

### *5. Conclusion*

Reviewing the characteristics of immortals and the eminent monks, we discover similarities as well as differences. More attention on the personal moral character was given to the monks in *KSC*. They also had a more intimate relationship with the lay people than had the immortals. Yet these are basically the results of the different nature of Taoism and Buddhism, as most of the monks were enthusiastic promoters of their faith, while, relatively speaking, the Taoist adepts tended to lead a solitary life. Although, as mentioned before, this does not imply that the relationship of the immortals with the lay world was unimportant. Both, however, did not emphasize the difficult process of reaching for their goals. This is also understandable if we consider that both works, in their func-

tional similarity to the hagiographies in the West, served as propagating tools in their own traditions. And for this purpose, more descriptions on the arduous process of the search for true life might produce some negative impressions on the would-be adepts.

As for the reasons that prompted them to embark on the way to immortality or Nirvana, similar situations were found in *SHC* and *KSC*. On the one hand, the initial drive for them to search for what they admired was mostly not caused by any obvious distress in life, which is a factor worth considering if one wishes to explain the spread of Buddhism or Taoism on the ground of people's search for a solution for their sufferings in life. On the other hand, it seems that, from the perspectives of the authors or of the source materials, no elaborate treatment was deemed necessary to explain the motive of their decisions, since searching for the Tao was a matter of fact—for who would not have opted for immortality? Looking at it from the reciprocal relationship between texts and audiences, this could also be a reflection of the attitude of the people for whom these works more or less aimed at providing some important messages catered to their state of mind.

Last but not least, the supernatural powers that both the immortals and the monks possessed reflected a deep religious sentiment and worldview: the world was filled with incredible supernatural forces, and these could be controlled or even utilized by the immortals as well as the monks. The Tao of the immortals and the Teaching of Buddha should be able to help people solve the difficulties in life. Here, however, is an interesting paradox: the monks or the immortals might have become devotees in their respective tradition not because of personal distress; the common folk, on the other hand, pledged their faith on the abilities of the monks and immortals to eradicate practical problems.

The recognition and articulation of this basic religious mentality, therefore, is of vital importance for our understanding of the development of Chinese religion since the period under our consideration. The development of Buddhism and Taoism should be seen, not only as the triumph of their "teachings", but also in the light of the continuous development of some basic religious mentality which had existed before the advance of Buddhism and Taoism, and which continued to exist after the establishment of

both religions. In a word, this basic religious mentality was to be the underlying principle of Chinese religions, or more precisely, Chinese folk religions in the disguise of whether Buddhism, Taoism, or "syncretism."<sup>71</sup> As for the reason why and the way how, based on this religious mentality, people decided to choose between or outside of the Taoist or Buddhist teachings, is a problem for future research.

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<sup>1</sup> See F.C. Grant, ed., *Hellenistic Religions* (N.Y.: Bobbs-Merrill, 1953), pp. xx-xxxix; A.D. Nock, *Conversion—The Old and the New in Religion from Alexander the Great to Augustine of Hippo* (London: Oxford University Press, 1933), pp. 1-16; F.E. Peters, *The Harvest of Hellenism* (N.Y.: Simon & Schuster, 1970), pp. 446-479.

<sup>2</sup> See Yü Ying-shih, "Han-Chin chih ch' shih chih hsin-tzu-chüeh yü hsin-ssu-ch'ao" *Chung-kuo chih-shih chieh-ts'eng shih-lun (kuo-tai p'ien)* (Taipei: Lien Ching, 1980), pp. 205-329; E. Balazs, "Nihilistic Revolt or Mystical Escapism," in *Chinese Civilization and Bureaucracy* (New Heaven: Yale U. Press, 1964), pp. 226-254.

<sup>3</sup> For a general picture, see the classic study by T'ang Yung-t'ung, *Han-Wei liang-chin nan-pei-ch'ao fo-chiao shih*, (Taipei: Ting Wen, 1962), pp. 188 ff.; Jen Chi-yü ed., *Chung-kuo fo-chiao shih*, vol. 1 (Peking: Hsin Hua, 1981), pp. 106-121; A.F. Wright, *Buddhism in Chinese History*, (Stanford: Stanford U. Press, 1958), pp. 21 ff.

<sup>4</sup> For example, see E. Zürcher, *The Buddhist Conquest of China*, (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1972), vol. I, p. 2; K. Ch'en, *Buddhism in China*, (Princeton: Princeton U. Press, 1964), pp. 48 ff.; P. Demiéville, "La Pénétration du Bouddhisme dans la tradition philosophique chinoise," *Cahiers d'histoire mondiale*, III (1956), pp. 19-38.

<sup>5</sup> See a recent discussion by P. Byrne, "Religion and the Religions" in S. Southerland et al. ed., *The World's Religions* (London: Routledge, 1988), pp. 3-28.

<sup>6</sup> The term "religious mentality" refers partly to the psychological factors, partly to the unnoticed customs or traditions that existed in one's belief, which nevertheless asserted decisive influence on the development of this belief. For a discussion of this term, see A. Gurevich, *Medieval Popular Culture: Problems of Belief and Perception* (Cambridge: Cambridge U. Press, 1988), pp. xii-xx.

<sup>7</sup> For a recent study of the Han religious expressions, see A. Seidel, "Traces of Han Religion in Funeral Texts Found in Tombs", in Akitsuki Kan'ei ed., *Dōkyō to shūkyō bunka* (Tokyo: Hirakawa, 1987), pp. 21-57. See also M. Loewe, *Chinese Ideas of Life and Death* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1982) for a general picture.

<sup>8</sup> C.f. Zürcher, op. cit., p. 3, who laments the limit posed by the existing texts on the scope of the study of early Buddhism in China as mainly concentrated on the actions and thoughts of the literati class instead of the lay devotees.

<sup>9</sup> For example, the tomb paintings and reliefs of the Han period often include images of various demons and monstrous animals as well as gods and immortals. These images are clearly of non-Confucian origin. For a collection of Han tomb

reliefs, see K. Finsterbusch, *Verzeichnis und Motivindex der Han-Darstellungen* 2 vols. (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1966, 1972). A study of the reliefs of one of the most famous Han offering shrines, the Wu-liang-ts'u, is by Wu Hung, *The Wu Liang Shrine* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1989). For a study of Han tombs and related problems, see Mu-chou Poo, *Mu-tsang yü sheng-ssu: chung-kuo ku-tai tsung-chiao chih hsing-ssu* (Taipei: Lien Ching, 1993).

<sup>10</sup> For a discussion of some of the Han intellectuals' ideas concerning thrifty burial, in contrast to the prevailing custom of rich burial followed by both the "Confucian" elite and the commoners, see Mu-chou Poo, "Ideas Concerning Death and Burial in Han and Pre-Han China," *Asia Major* 3rd series, vol. III, pt. 2, (1990), pp. 25-62.

<sup>11</sup> For a discussion of the methodological problems involved in the study of popular culture, see P. Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe*, (N.Y.: Harper, 1978), pp. 23 ff. A collection of important papers on popular culture in Europe is Steven L. Kaplan ed., *Understanding Popular Culture: Europe from the Middle Ages to the Nineteenth Century* (Berlin: Mouton, 1984). For discussions on the Chinese side of the problems, see C. Bell, "Religion and Chinese Culture: Toward an Assessment of Popular Religion," in *History of Religions* 28 (1989), pp. 33-57; C. Jochim, "Great and Little, Grid and Group: Defining the Poles of the Elite-Popular Continuum in Chinese Religion," in *Journal of Chinese Religions* no. 16 (Fall 1988), pp. 18-24; Steven Sangren, "Great Tradition and Little Traditions Reconsidered: The Question of Cultural Integration in China," *Journal of Chinese Studies* 1 (1984), pp. 1-24.

<sup>12</sup> For a preliminary effort, see Mu-chou Poo, "Popular Religion in Pre-imperial China: Observations on the Almanacs of Shui-hu-ti," *T'oung Pao* (forthcoming).

<sup>13</sup> There are two most widely known editions of *SHC*, one is the *Kuang han-wei ts'ung-shu* (*KHWTS*) edition, which includes 92 biographies; the other is the *Ssu-k'ü ch'üan-shu* (*SKCS*) edition, with 84 biographies. Other editions such as *Tseng-tin han-wei ts'ung-shu*, *Lung-wei mi-shu*, *Shuo-k'ü*, are the same as the first, while that in *Tao-tsang ching-hua lu* has 94 biographies. As for which of the two major editions was closer to the original, no general consensus has been reached. The author of *Ssu-k'ü t'i-yao* prefers the *SKCS* edition, while Kominami Ichirō, "Shinsenden no hukuen," in Iriya Yoshitaka Ogawa Tamaki ryokyōju taikyusu chūgoku kokaku chūgoku bunkaku ronshū (Kyoto: Kyoto University, 1974), pp. 301-313, thinks the *KHWTS* edition closer to the original. Fukui Kōjun was of the same opinion, although he considers the date of the present text very late. See his "Shinsenden kō," in *Tōhō Shūkyō* v. 1 (1951); id., "Shinsenden zokukō," in *Shūkyō Kenkyū* v. 137 (1963). If we compare the two editions, it is clear that in some of the biographies, whenever the facts are basically the same while the exact wordings differ slightly, the *SKCS* edition usually are more accurate. (Compare, for examples, the biographies of Kuang-ch'eng-tzu, P'eng-tsu, Wei Po-yang, Wang Yuan, Ch'eng Wei's wife.) This seems to indicate that the *SKCS* edition is earlier and less corrupted. Take, for another example, the biography of Chiao-hsian. The description in the *SKCS* edition carries little phantastic accounts, which is rather close to the story of Chiao-hsian quoted by P'ei Sung-chih in his annotation to the *San Kuo Chih* (p. 363), or that which is quoted in Huang-fu Mi, *Kao Shih Chuan* (Taipei: Chung-hua, 1970), p. 11. The same person in the *KHWTS* edition, however, possessed some special abilities such as resisting the burning of fire and the freezing of snow, which is closer to the account given in Chang Hua, *Po-wu-chih* (Taipei: Shang-wu,

SKCS ed. vol. 1047), p. 592. Considering the fact that Chiao-hsian was a historical figure, stories about him contained in the SKCS edition seem to be closer to his time when he was not yet immortalized. This, however, does not mean that the whole SKCS edition was closer to the original text. In some other biographies, the KHWTS edition was more detailed. (Compare the biographies of Wang Chung-tu, Kung Sung, Lu nü-sheng, Feng Heng). In view of this textual uncertainty, therefore, only major characteristics of immortals, rather than the exact wordings of the texts, are considered in this investigation.

The edition of SHC I use in this study is the *Ssu-k'ü ch'üan-shu* edition. A translation of this text into German is by Gertrud Güntsch, *Das Shen-hsien chuan und das Erscheinungsbild eines Hsien* (Würzburger Sino-Japonica 16) (Bern, Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1988).

<sup>14</sup> See A.F. Wright, "Biography and Hagiography: Hui-chiao's Lives of Eminent Monks," in *Silver Jubilee Volume of the Zinbun-kagaku Kenkyusyo Kyoto University* (Kyoto: Kyoto U., 1954), pp. 383-432. More recently, Su Chin-jen, "Liang Shih Hui-chiao chi ch'i Kao Seng Chuan," in *Shih-chieh Tsung-chiao Yen-chiu* 1981, 1: 133-140. The edition of KSC I use is published by the Taiwan Sutra Printing House (Taiwan Yin-ching Ch'u), 1973.

<sup>15</sup> According to the preface to the *Biographies of the Immortals*, the purpose of the author was to prove to his disciples that the immortals did exist and that he had written this collective biography for some "gentlemen with true knowledge and far sight."

<sup>16</sup> The fact that there is a time difference of about two hundred years between these two works should not be taken as too great an obstacle, since what we are interested in is only to compare the religious mentalities revealed in them. How these mentalities were related to their specific historical context is a much more complicated problem that cannot be discussed here.

<sup>17</sup> Ko Hung, *Pao P'u Tzu* (Taipei: Shih-chieh, 1969), p. 203.

<sup>18</sup> *San Kuo Chih* (Peking: Chung-hua, 1970), p. 1427.

<sup>19</sup> *Liang Shu*, (Peking: Chung-hua, 1970), p. 742; *Nan Shih* (Peking: Chung-hua, 1970), p. 1897.

<sup>20</sup> It has been suggested that the ideas concerning the nature of immortals in SHC are different from those that are in *Pao P'u Tzu*, therefore the SHC we have now is not the original text of Ko Hung. See Kominami Ichirō, "Gishin jidai no shinsen shisō—shinsenden wo choshin toshite," in Yamada Keiji ed., *Chūgoku no kagaku to kagakusha* (Kyoto: Kyoto U., 1978), pp. 573-625. The fundamental assumption of this theory is that Ko Hung held a consistent attitude when he wrote both works. Yet considering the nature of SHC as a compiled work, one should not be surprised if some inconsistencies existed between it and *Pao P'u Tzu*, which propagates mainly his own ideas.

<sup>21</sup> Wright, "Biography and Hagiography: Hui-chiao's Lives of Eminent Monks."

<sup>22</sup> The textual comparison given in note 13 provides are clear example of this point: the essential characteristics of the biographies are not easily altered.

<sup>23</sup> See, most recently, a general treatment of this subject by I. Robinet, "The Taoist Immortal: Jesters of Light and Shadow, Heaven and Earth," *Journal of Chinese Religion* 13/14 (1985-86), pp. 87-105. For the Han period, see Yü Ying-shih, "Life and Immortality in the Mind of Han China," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 25 (1964-65), pp. 80-122. A convenient bibliography on this topic can be found in Fukui Kojun ed., *Dōkyō*, vol. III, (Tokyo: Hirakawa 1983), pp. 431-433.

Also see A. Seidel, "Chronicle of Taoist Studies in the West 1950-1990," *Cahiers d'extrême-Asie* 5 (1989-1990): 223-347.

<sup>24</sup> For examples, see the various articles collected in L. Kohn ed., *Taoist Meditation and Longevity Techniques* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1989).

<sup>25</sup> I list their names in the various Books in *SHC* below: Book 2: Wei Po-yang; Shen Chien; Book 3: Wang Yuan; Book 4: Mo-tzu; Liu Cheng; Sun Po; Book 5: Chang Tao-ling; Ying Ch'ang-sheng; Book 6: King of Huai-nan; Liu Kang; Book 7: Liu Ching; Ssu Tzu-hsun; Book 8: Ko Hsuan; Tso Tz'u; Liu Ken; Book 9: Yin Kui; Chieh Hsiang; Book 10: Huang Ching.

<sup>26</sup> Respectively: Book 2: Huang Ch'u-p'ing; Book 7: Yen Ch'ing; Book 10: Wang Hsing.

<sup>27</sup> *SHC* Book 1.

<sup>28</sup> Ko Hung, *Pao P'u Tzu* (Taipei: Shih-chieh, 1969), p. 5; cf. James R. Ware, *Alchemy, Medicine, Religion in the China of A.D. 320: The Nei P'ien of Ko Hung (Pao P'u Tzu)* (Cambridge, MIT Press, 1966), p. 42. Translation mine.

<sup>29</sup> Ko Hung, *Pao P'u Tzu*, p. 6; cf. Ware, op. cit., p. 46.

<sup>30</sup> *SHC* Book 1: P'eng Tsu; Book 4: Mo-tzu; Liu Chent; Yü-tzu; Book 5: Yin Ch'ang-sheng, Chang Tao-ling; Book 7: Kuai Tzu-hsün; Book 8: Ko Hsüan, Tso Tz'u.

<sup>31</sup> *SHC* Book 2: Lu Kung; Shen Chien; Lo Tzu-chang; Wei Po-yang; Book 3: Ch'en An-shih; Wang Yuan; Book 6: Li Shao-chun; Book 7: Tung-Kuo Yen; Book 10: Huang Ching.

<sup>32</sup> *SHC*, Book 9, p. 3.

<sup>33</sup> *SHC*, Book 2, p. 7.

<sup>34</sup> *SHC*, Book 3, p. 1.

<sup>35</sup> *SHC*, Book 7, p. 3.

<sup>36</sup> *Pao P'u Tzu*, Book 3, pp. 11-12. Similar ideas can be found in Book 6, p. 27. Cf. Ware, op. cit., p. 66, translation mine.

<sup>37</sup> *Pao P'u Tzu*, Book 8, p. 33, translation mine. Cf. Ware, op. cit., p. 138.

<sup>38</sup> Kohn, op. cit.; See Fu Ch'in-chia, *Chung-kuo Tao-chiao-shih* (Taipei: Shang-wu, 1975 reprint), pp. 121-141; Fukui Kojun ed., *Dōkyō* vol. I, pp. 239-328; H. Maspero, *Taoism* (tr. by F.A. Kierman) (Amhurst: U. of Mass. Press, 1981), pp. 265-298; Yoshimi Murakami, *Chūgoku no sennin*, (Kyoto: Heiraku, 1971), pp. 41ff.

<sup>39</sup> At least 25 of the immortals in *SHC* possessed one or more of such kinds of abilities, I refer only to a few examples: Book 1, p. 9; Book 3, p. 2; Book 5, p. 6; Book 7, p. 6.

<sup>40</sup> This attitude is fundamental to the popular religious mentality. For a discussion of similar religious mentality as revealed in a text of the Ch'in period, see Poo Mu-chou, "Popular Religion in Early Imperial China: Observations on the Almanac of Ch'in," *T'oung Pao* (forthcoming); id., "Shui-hu-ti ch'in-chien jih-shu ti shih-chieh," in *Li-shih yü-yen yen-chiu-so chi-k'an* vol. 62, no. 4 (1992), pp. 1-53. Also see D. Harper, "A Chinese Demonography of the Third Century B.C.," in *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* (1985), pp. 459-498; M. Loewe, "The Almanacs (*jih-shu*) from Shui-hu-ti," in *Asia Major* 3rd series, (1988), vol. I.pt. 2, pp. 1-28; M. Kalinowski, "Les Traités de Shuihudi et l'hemerologie Chinoise à la Fin des Royaumes-Combattants," *T'oung Pao* LXXII (1986), pp. 175-228. For a discussion on the folk religion of the Han period, see A. Seidel, "Traces of Han Religion in Funeral Texts Found in Tombs."

<sup>41</sup> For examples, see the descriptions of Chih Tao-lin (*KSC*, p. 100), Chih Hsiao-lung (*KSC*, p. 93), Chu Seng-tu (*KSC*, p. 110), Shih Hui-yuan (*KSC*, p.

137), Shih Hui-ching (*KSC*, p. 194), Shih Seng-ching (*KSC*, p. 200), Shih Chao-chin (*KSC*, p. 203), Shih Hui-tung (*KSC*, p. 205).

<sup>42</sup> Wright, *op. cit.*, argues that Hui Chiao's personal bias caused him to record mostly monks from a higher social and intellectual background.

<sup>43</sup> Tang Yung-t'ung, *op. cit.*, chapter 13, 14; Zürcher, *op. cit.*, pp. 104 ff.; K. Ch'en, *op. cit.*, pp. 77 ff.

<sup>44</sup> E.g. An Shih-kao (*KSC* p. 2), Chu Seng-tu (*KSC*, p. 11), Chu Shu-lan (*KSC*, p. 93).

<sup>45</sup> E.g., Tan Ko-chia-lo (*KSC*, p. 9), Hwei-yüan (*KSC*, p. 137), Seng Chao (*KSC*, p. 166). Similarly, *KSC*, pp. 82, 129, 156, 321.

<sup>46</sup> Shih Fa-wu abandoned worldly belongings and became a monk after his wife died (*KSC*, p. 302).

<sup>47</sup> Tan Wu-ch'an was sent to a foreign monk as a disciple by his mother, seeing that this monk was venerated by lay people as well as monks, and was well provided in his daily needs (*KSC*, p. 51).

<sup>48</sup> Wei Chih-nan (*KSC*, p. 15; similarly, p. 44).

<sup>49</sup> See the biography of Shih Chih-cheng, *KSC*, p. 313.

<sup>50</sup> These are: 1. translators, 2. exegetes, 3. theurgists, 4. meditators, 5. disciplinarians, 6. self-immolators, 7. cantors, 8. promoters of works of merit, 9. hymnodists, 10. sermonists. Cf. Wright, *op. cit.*, p. 405.

<sup>51</sup> For the relationship between the magical power of the monks in the *KSC* and the spiritual efficacy, *shen-t'ung*, in the Buddhist teachings, see Yoshimi Murakami, "Kosoten no shini nitsuite," *Tōhō Shūkyō* 17 (1961), pp. 1-17.

<sup>52</sup> *KSC*, p. 284.

<sup>53</sup> The following biographies all contain descriptions concerning ghosts and spirits: Book 2, T'an Wu-ch'an; Book 5, Shih T'an-i; Chu-fa-k'uang; Book 6, Hwei-yung; Shih T'an-yung; Book 12, Po Seng-kuang; Chu T'an-yu; Book 14, Hui-kuo; Hui-ching.

<sup>54</sup> *KSC*, p. 285.

<sup>55</sup> See R. & Ch. Brooke, *Popular Religion in the Middle Ages* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1984), pp. 31-45; Gurevich, *op. cit.*, pp. 39 ff.

<sup>56</sup> *SHC* Book 2, p. 262. In *Pao P'u Tzu*, Ko Hung actually believed that the art of becoming immortal was for everyone to learn. See T'ang I-chieh, *Wei-chin Nan-pei-ch'ao shih-chi ti Tao-chiao* (Taipei: Tung-ta. 1988), p. 179-188.

<sup>57</sup> *Lieh Hsien Chuan* in *Ssu-k'ü ch'üan-shu* (Taipei: Shang-wu reprint, v. 1058). It is true that some of the immortals are the ancient saints such as the Yellow Emperor, or Lao-tzu, whose moral integrity was naturally assumed to be part of their characters. Yet in the stories about most of the other immortals, only their deeds were recorded, without any reference to their moral character as a condition to gain immortality. It is interesting to note that, in two rather comprehensive studies of the idea of the immortals, no discussion was devoted to the relationship between moral character and immortality. See Yoshimi Murakami, *Chūgoku no sennin*; Tsuda Sokichi, *Shinsen shisō no kenkyū* (Tokyo: Iwanami, 1939). In his *Taoism and Chinese Religion* (tr. F.A. Kierman Jr., Amherst: University of Massachusetts, 1981), pp. 272-274, Maspero mentioned the "spiritual techniques" for achieving immortality and no more could he say about the moral prerequisites except to mention the passage in *Pao P'u Tzu* that we shall discuss below, note 61. For a translation of *Lieh Hsien Chuan*, see M. Kaltenmark, *Lie-sien-tchouan* (Peking, 1953).

<sup>58</sup> *San Kuo Chih*, pp. 263-264.

<sup>59</sup> The date of T'ai P'ing Ching has been variously dated to the Eastern Han, the Southern and Northern Dynasties, or even later. It is certain that the work is a collection of various texts with different histories of transmission. To assign the whole work in its present condition to one date, therefore, does not solve the problem. In view of the general tone and cultural context of some of the chapters, a late Eastern Han date for them should not be off the mark. For scholars holding this view, see Wang Ming, "Lun T'ai-p'ing-ching ti ch'eng-shu shih-tai ho tso-che," in *Tao-chia ho tao-chiao ssu-hsiang yen-chiu* (Ch'ung-ch'ing: Hsin-hua, 1984), pp. 183-200; B.J. Mansvelt Beck, "The Date of the Taiping Jing," in *T'ung Pao* vol. LXVI, 4-5 (1980), pp. 149-182; Max Kaltenmark, "The Ideology of the T'ai-p'ing ching," in *Facets of Taoism*, H. Welch and A. Seidel eds. (New Haven: Yale U. Press, 1979), pp. 19-52. Also see J. Petersen, "The Early Tradition Relating to the Han Dynasty Transmission of the *Taiping jing*, Part 1," *Acta Orientalia* (1989), 50:133-71; Part 2 forthcoming *Acta Orientalia* 51 (1990). Yoshioka Yoshitoyo, "Tonkōben Taiheikyō to Bukkyō," in *Dōkyō to Bukkyō* vol. 2 (Tokyo: Toshima Shobō, 1970), pp. 11-161, argues that the present text came from the sixth century.

<sup>60</sup> E.g. Wang Ming, *T'ai P'ing Ching he-chiao* (Taipei: Ting Wen, 1979 reprint), p. 138: "As man had performed no beneficent deeds for the heaven and the earth, ... the Heaven therefore would not grant the elixir to him."

<sup>61</sup> *Pao P'u Tzu*, Book 3, p. 12, translation mine. Cf. Ware, op. cit., p. 66.

<sup>62</sup> For examples, see the story of Wu Meng (*Chin shu*, pp. 2482-2483), who was "given" the divine recipe by a neighbor. Another story relates that a certain Tai Yang had died because of illness when he was twelve. Yet after five days he returned from death and said that "Heaven" had conferred him official titles and granted him talisman. (*Chin Shu*, p. 2469). Similar stories can be found in *Pei Ch'i Shu*, pp. 674; 677.

<sup>63</sup> T'ang I-chieh, op. cit., pp. 133-140.

<sup>64</sup> It should be remembered that Taoism as a religion was basically anti-social and anti-establishment. The "democratic" spirit was only a natural outcome of this basic attitude.

<sup>65</sup> See Ku Chieh-kang, *Ch'in-Han ti fang-shih yü ju-sheng* (Shanghai: Jenmin, 1962); Kenneth DeWoskin, *Doctors, Diviners, and Magicians of Ancient China* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983).

<sup>66</sup> For the inscriptions, see B. Karlgren, "Early Chinese Mirror inscriptions," in *Bulletin of the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities* no. 6 (1934), pp. 9 ff. A discussion of the mirrors, the inscriptions, and their relationship with Taoist religion in our period is provided by S. Cahill, "The Word Made Bronze: Inscriptions on Medieval Chinese Bronze Mirrors," *Archives of Asian Art* 39 (1986), pp. 62-70.

<sup>67</sup> See, for example, the poems by Juan Chi and Ts'ao Chih, in Lu Ch'in-li ed., *Hsien-ch'in han-wei-chin nan-pei-ch'ao shih* (Taipei: Mu-tuo, 1983 reprint), pp. 454, 504, 510.

<sup>68</sup> *Chin Shu*, p. 2504. For translation of the biographies, see DeWoskin, op. cit., pp. 155-166.

<sup>69</sup> The economical benefits of joining the Buddhist establishment include the exemptions from taxes and corvée. This aspect of the Buddhist religion has long been studied. See, for example, Ho Tzu-ch'üan, "Chung-ku shih-tai chih Chung-kuo fo-chiao shih-yüan," in Ho Tzu-ch'üan, ed., *Wu-shih nien lai Han-t'ang fo-chiao shih-yüan ching-chi yen-chiu* (Peking: Shih-fan ta-hsüeh, 1986), pp. 1-64; Hsieh Ch'ung-kuang, *Han-t'ang fo-chiao she-hui shih-lun* (Taipei: Kuo-chi Wen-hua,

1990), pp. 1-39; 293-320; Tzukamoto Zenryu, "Sogiko buttoko seido nitsuite," *Tōyōshih kenkyū* 2-3 (1937), pp. 99-140.

<sup>70</sup> See Ch'en Yin-ch'üeh, *Wei-chin Nan-pei-ch'ao shih yen-chiang lu* (Ho-Fei: Huang-Shan, 1987), p. 351-357.

<sup>71</sup> On the inadequacy of the use of "syncretism" in the Chinese situation, see Seidel, "Chronicle of Taoist Studies in the West 1950-1990," p. 246.

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R.J.Z. WERBLOWSKY

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- B.J. TER HAAR, *The White Lotus Teachings in Chinese Religious History* (Leiden, Brill), 1992, cloth, pp. xiii + 343, ISBN 90-04-094148.
- PATRICIA BUCKLEY EBREY, *Chu Hsi's Family Rituals* (Princeton, Princeton U.P., Princeton Library of Asian Translations), 1991, pb., pp. xxxi + 234, ISBN 90-04-094148.
- GILBERT ROZMAN (ed.), *The East Asian Region: Confucian Heritage and its Modern Adaptation* (Princeton, Princeton U.P.) 1991, cloth, pp. 239, \$ 25.—, ISBN 0-8248-1354-5.

B. Faure's milestone work on Chinese Ch'an *La volonté d'orthodoxie* has already been mentioned in NUMEN (XXXVII, 1990:121). Faure is not the only author to "rehabilitate" the so-called Northern School in a manner that necessitates the re-writing of early Ch'an history (including the erroneous equations northern = gradualist, southern = subitist), but he certainly is one of the most subtle and authoritative. His *Le Bouddhisme Ch'an en mal d'histoire* might well be described as vol. 2 of the book mentioned before. Vol 3 (*The rhetoric of immediacy*) appeared in 1991. The work

under review here also provides an annotated translation of "The Memorial concerning the Masters and Disciplines of the Lankavatara Sutra", a northern school text of which several recensions have been found at Dunhuang. The first part of the book, which deals with the author Ching-chueh (first half of the 8th cent.) is a major contribution to our "new" understanding of the "pre-classical" forms of (especially northern) Ch'an. The importance of the Lankavatara is well-known to everyone who has read his Suzuki. Faure's study takes us a great deal further. We are looking forward to vol. 7 of the *Cahiers d'Extrême-Asie* which will be devoted to Zen and dedicated to Yanagida Seizan to whom also Faure's study is much indebted. The splendid decision of having a special volume on Zen, to dedicate it to Yanagida, and to invite B. Faure to act as guest-editor of the volume was one of the last editorial decisions of the founder/editor of the *Cahiers*, the late Anna Seidel, before her premature death.

The major standard work on, and overall survey of, Ch'an is, and will remain for a long time to come (in spite of occasionally serious though mostly quibbling criticisms that can be scribbled into the margin of almost every page), the 2-vol. History of Zen Buddhism by the *doyen* of western Zen students, Heinrich Dumoulin. NUMEN (XXXII, 1986:252-3) already mentioned the original and much smaller German ed. of 1959, its English translation (1963), and the major revised German version, in 2 volumes, published in 1983 and 1986. At long last the English version, further revised, has appeared in both hardcover and paperback, and to refer to it in a brief review rather than in a full-length article is almost an insult. Nobody is better aware of the revolutionary acceleration of current Ch'an research (Faure, Buswell, McRae, Gregory, Bielefeldt), and of the fact that even the most up-to-date overall survey is already out of date by the time it is sent to press, than the still active octogenarian grand old man of Zen studies. No doubt this truth will also be confirmed by the revised 2nd ed. due to appear before long. In fact, Dumoulin has already published a supplement to his *magnum opus*, dealing especially with early Chinese Ch'an (JJRSt.20, 1993:31-53). The author does not hide his (almost one-sided) indebtedness to Japanese Zen scholarship in general and to Yanagida Seizan in particular. The Japanese preference is also evident from the fact that vol. 1, dealing with "India and China" has 301 pp. (excluding the appendices) whilst vol. 2 "Japan" has 423 pp. To what extent Chinese Ch'an is really rooted in the Indian Buddhist tradition, will become questionable to the reader who struggles through the Chinese chapters. Vol. 2 on Japan may seem to pay too much detailed attention to Dogen, but considering the flurry of recent Dogen research after a long

period of relative neglect, one should complain neither about this nor about the fuller treatment given to Soto. The appendices (Chinese characters; correspondences between Chinese and Japanese pronunciations; indices of proper names, subjects and technical terms; genealogies of the various schools (in both volumes); and full bibliography (at the end of vol. 2) make this work even more indispensable than it is anyhow. No matter what criticisms of details can and will be made, and what changes will be imposed by new monographic publications, Dumoulin's *opus* will remain a standard reference work to which we shall always gratefully resort.

The 81 Transformations of Lao-tzu are a major chapter in the history of the Taoist-Buddhist conflict in China. As is well-known, the "conversion of the barbarians" by Lao-tzu after leaving through the mountain-pass and disappearing in the West is an ancient legend, at first not unwelcome to the Buddhists since it gave some kind of Chinese legitimation to that foreign (meaning barbarian) and un-Chinese intrusion called Buddhism. In due course, however, the idea became a Taoist polemical cudgel with which to beat the Buddhists: your Buddha is after all merely an incarnation of Lao-tzu. The tract describing and illustrating (blockprints) the 81 transformations was propagandistic dynamite. When Li-Chih-ch'ang, abbot of the Abbey of Eternal Spring (1238-1256) printed and distributed the tract, the result was not only an uproar but also a series of public debates (1255, 1258, 1281) which the Taoists lost. The Taoist canon was ordered to be destroyed, and the Chuan-chen branch of Taoism actually went into a partial eclipse. Only one 16th cent. copy of this tract survived, and fortunately Prof. H. Franke made a photocopy before his original too disappeared from a library in Australia. Based on this photocopy, Dr. Reiter has now published (and translated) this fascinating text and its even more fascinating pictures, and added a useful introduction (pp. 9-46).

Descending from the lofty heights of religious mysticism and philosophy to what is usually referred to as "folk religion", the *chih-ma* ("paper horses") are of special interest since they are not found in temples. They belong to what is called the "domestic cult" of home, shop or place of work. Once printed (for subsequent burning, or hanging on walls, or pasting on doorposts) they are a *presentia realis* of the deity depicted. In the words of H. Doré "Previous to the printing of the pictures, there existed but a common sheet of paper; no sooner, however, is it printed than the god comes and abides therein. Should then, a hundred, or a thousand copies be printed, there are as many duplicates of the divinity, who is thus reproduced and made present upon each printed sheet".

Mrs. Anne Goodrich, during her many years in Peking (mainly in the

thirties), systematically acquired such gods and has now presented us with a systematic “Look at Home Worship”. Although the production and use of these paper gods may revive also on the mainland (in fact, the writer of these lines has assembled quite a number, but printed not on paper but on plastic!), many of the author’s examples undoubtedly reflect past practices, and it is not always clear which is which. The 18 chapters attempt to divide the paper gods in categories (New Year; Wealth; Birth and Children; Medicine; Hell Kings; Taoist, Buddhist and Miscellaneous Deities etc.), and occasionally the reader feels that other divisions might have been more helpful. The English names of the deities should have been given after the Chinese not only in the text but also in the legend after each picture. Surely a picture would mean more to the beholder if under Feng-po Yu-shuai he could also read “Count of Wind and General of Rain”. But these are petty and trivial complaints about an extremely instructive and well-produced book that fills a real lacuna.

During her stay in Peking Mrs. Goodrich, often accompanied by her husband Prof. L. Carrington Goodrich, did more than collect paper gods: cf. her *The Peking Temple of the Eastern Peak*, 1964. Her small book on “The Peking Temple of the Eighteen Hells and Chinese Conceptions of Hell” (first printing 1981) is a kind of sequel to the 1964 publication. The title *Chinese Hells* already indicates the problem. We are dealing here not with pictures of hell, the hell-kings viz. infernal judges and their henchmen, but with three-dimensional representations of hell as can still be seen in one or two samples that have managed to survive in temples on the mainland, or in the China collection of the Field Museum in Chicago. Non-sinologists may remember the descriptions of these “chambers of horrors” in some of van Gulik’s Judge Dee detective stories. No doubt hells and their rulers, especially Wen-lo Wang (Ch.) viz. Emma-o or Emma-ten (J.)—metamorphoses of the Indian Yama-rajā—are “in”. There have been recent publications galore on “Chinese” hells i.e., about Chinese ideas concerning the afterlife and the “infernal” judgement and tortures that are part of it. Yet the Buddhist character of also Taoist hells is undisputed. But what about the 18 hells of Mrs. Goodrich’s temple (which has long since disappeared)? The standard number of hells and hell-kings is 10. The subject, as said before, is “in”, if we may judge by the profusion of publications and picture albums (cf. in 1990 only the beautifully produced Japanese album *Jigoku*, or the Taiwan publication by Noel Donnelly *A Journey through Chinese Hells: Hell Scrolls from Taiwan*). Although Indian Buddhism had various systems (Ababa, Avici), and although the standard Tao-Buddhist number is 10, we also find listings of 18 to 72 or more hells. Mrs. Goodrich’s description is valuable because

she visited the temple with a Chinese teacher and faithfully reproduces his explanations (whatever they may be worth). In an “aside” the author makes a point that has been stressed before also in NUMEN: transmigration-religions have, by definition, no “hells” but only (contra LeGoffe) purgatories. The fact that Mrs. Goodrich’s little book saw a second printing in less than ten years attests to the usefulness of her account.

Those interested in the history of Chinese so-called “heterodox sects” probably think of the White Lotus and the Yellow Turbans as a kind of Siamese twins. The very different history of the two has been discussed in illuminating fashion by D. Overmyer. But our knowledge of the White Lotus (“teachings” and/or “society”) still remained sadly deficient. To mention but a few of the most obvious lacunae: does the term refer to one movement (which would imply historical continuity) or to many and very different groups? Is it an autonym (used by whom? for what reason? and at what times?), a self-designation or a label used by Buddhist establishment writers, literati bureaucrats, and official and less official heterodoxy viz. rebellion hunters? What rendered this form of lay-Buddhism so suspect, and what accounts for the different features of the White Lotus at different times (Amida incantation, meditation, eschatologically oriented and hence dangerous “Maitreyization”, quietistic or activist character, forms of organisation)? The author is abreast of the latest western and Japanese research on the subject, which serves him as a springboard for his own, very detailed and subtle, analysis not only of the historical data but also of the assumptions and methods (including shortcomings) of modern scholarship. This study of the White Lotus, actually the revised version of a Leiden Ph.D. thesis, is a work of mature and carefully crafted scholarship of which the author as well as those who encouraged him (Professors Erik Zürcher, Susan Naquin, Valerie Hansen) can justly be proud.

Although everybody knows, writes and talks about the importance of ritual in (pre-modern only?) China, few ritual “codes” are available in western languages. Chu Hsi’s text is perhaps the most authoritative and influential for the early modern (i.e., Sung) period, and it remained authoritative until the demise of the Empire. Chu Hsi, the rigid and unbending incarnation of “neo-Confucian” orthodoxy was, in fact, practical and pragmatic, and tried—as much as possible—to seek compromise and balance. The rules for capping, wedding and other ceremonies (including sacrifices!) are laid down clearly and in detail. It comes as no surprise that ch. 4 on funerals (including the domestic pre-funeral as well as post-burial and mourning rites) is the largest and most detailed. In fact,

de Groot's *Religious System* might be described as a 6-volume version of Chu Hsi's ch. 4. Prof. Ebrey's translation is a valuable contribution to our knowledge of Confucian *praxis*. Pp. 184-212 reproduce the 1314 ed. (at present in Taipeh) of Chu Hsi's text. The excellent introduction (pp. xiii-xxxi) does not in the least diminish our expectation of the author's promised interpretative companion volume.

Prof. P. Ebrey is not alone, for Chu Hsi is obtaining much scholarly attention in recent years (cf. Prof. Chan's *Chu Hsi and Neo-Confucianism*, his translation of Chu Hsi's *Reflections*, and his recent (1989) *Chu Hsi: New Studies*), but obviously Confucianism is much more than Chu Hsi and even China. We have to go beyond China and seek to understand the Korean and Japanese versions of Confucianism if we want to grasp the cultural pattern underlying much of East Asia. This wide range is the explicit subject of one of the most remarkable studies to appear in recent years. What is it that makes East Asia a geo-cultural unit, comparable to e.g. the "West", and what is Confucian about it? France is not Germany and Austria is not England yet all are referred to as the West. China is not Korea, and Japan is not Vietnam. Are they all "East Asia" because of their underlying Confucianism? But not only their cultures but also their "Confucianisms" are so very different. To deal with this subject, which has acquired new relevance because of the question to what extent the varieties of Confucianism obstruct or facilitate modernisation (cf. e.g., most recently, KATO Shuichi, or P.-E. Will, "The Resilience of Confucianism in Contemporary Societies", 1991-2), the historian of culture should also be a sociologist, and scholarship must be supplemented by subtlety. This is exactly what Rozman's *The East Asian Region* provides. China is in the competent hands of Patricia Ebrey; Korea and the relatively later "confucianisation" of Japan are in equally competent hands. Since Hayashi Razan is mentioned several times in the chapters on Japan, the present writer may be allowed to quote a (probably apocryphal) report in Razan's biography of Fujiwara Saika. (The story is also retold in the 19th cent. *Tokugawa jikki*). Having conquered Japan "on horse-back", Ieyasu is said to have remarked "you can conquer a country on horseback, but you cannot rule it from there", implying that for that reason Ieyasu, his Buddhist inclinations notwithstanding, found Confucianism indispensable as a legitimating socio-ethical ideology. In the two chapters of pt. 2 ("The Modern Transition: De-Confucianization or Re-Confucianization") the editor, G. Rozman, compares modern China and Japan, and Michael Robinson deals with Korea. In addition to the chapter just mentioned the editor also contributes (pp. 3-42) an Introduction which sets the East Asian Region in Comparative Perspective. The

book is a “must” for students not only of Confucianism but also of contemporary East Asia.

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## BOOK REVIEWS

HOYT CLEVELAND TILLMAN, *Confucian Discourse and Chu Hsi's Ascendancy*—  
Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press 1992 (XV + 328 p.) ISBN  
0 8248 1416 9 \$ 38.00.

This is a very good book, a very important book, and a rather difficult book.

Chu Hsi (1130-1200 CE), often referred to as “China’s Thomas Aquinas” is known for synthesizing into “NeoConfucianism” the major strands of Chinese intellectual life. Although Chu was a vigorous opponent of both Buddhism and Taoism (especially its religious form), by his era, the meditation practices of both traditions, the metaphysical and psychological speculations of Buddhism, and the proto-science implicit in Taoist alchemy, medicine, and divination had become so permanent a part of Chinese thinking that any comprehensive worldview had to deal with these currents in one way or another. Received scholarship—especially that in the West—has tended to give a rather isolating treatment to Chu Hsi as the pre-eminent leader of rationalist Confucianism who managed to account for known reality in a way that was recognized even in his own time as a grand unifying theory.

With formidable scholarship and analysis. Tillman contributes two critical perspectives to our understanding of twelfth century intellectual life in China. Chu was not universally understood by his contemporaries (either supporters or opponents) to be a unique intellectual leader. Tillman shrewdly divides Chu’s intellectual life into four significant periods marked by Chu’s relationship with, and status relative to, other thinkers. During much of that time, it was others who were recognized as the pre-eminent intellectual voices of that school of Confucianism to which Chu adhered. Chu gradually rose to prominence partly through ability as a scholar, force of personality, and skill in debating, and partly by the luck of relative longevity.

Tillman suggests that Lǔ Tsu-ch’ien (1137-1181) might well have come down to us as China’s principal intellectual architect except for his early death. In contrast to Chu’s temper and tendency towards establishing sharp differences with opponents, Lǔ sought mediating syntheses. Lǔ also possessed a very wide-ranging mind capable of relating apparently unconnected issues. Whereas “instead of debunking divination, Chu Hsi was actually promoting it among literati of his day as a useful instrument in

spiritual cultivation” (120), “according to Lü, the different qualities that appeared in the divination process were nothing more than manifestations of one’s own mind.” (121). As members of the meritocratic scholarly-bureaucracy, both men had administrative responsibilities and skills, but “whereas Lü was more attentive to national issues, Chu excelled in the middle level of community organizations.” (127) Born into the learned aristocracy, Lü apparently assumed his scholarship with a natural modesty and claimed little for himself, but seems to have had more students than any figure of his time. In contrast, Chu, who criticized the consciousness as a source of egoism, and who objected to Lü’s tendency to find harmonious compromises, somewhat ironically responded to Lü’s death by openly claiming leadership of their school.

In addition to questioning the uniqueness of Chu’s stature, Tillman also demonstrates that the intellectual ethos of the Southern Sung Dynasty was one of factions and groups so that leadership of the mind meant for Lü and subsequently Chu, being recognized as the principal thinker within their *Tao Hsueh* faction, which Tillman very helpfully terms a “fellowship”. The fellowship was “a network of social relations and a sense of community with a shared tradition that distinguished them from other Confucians.” Its members “forged personal, political, and intellectual ties in a common effort to reform political culture, revive ethical values, and rectify Confucian learning.” (3) The fellowship had rituals which were performed when members were together; its members kept in intimate contact through correspondence despite their being sent to different ends of the country as officials; and both Lü and Chu worked (often effectively) to promote the fortunes of younger members of the *Tao Hsueh* group over those of other factions.

Even today, intellectual discourse in China generally refers both to the thought of an individual and to the faction, group, clique, or school with which that person is associated. It has long been disorienting to read in English of the singular pre-eminence of individual figures in the history of Chinese ideas. Tillman has accomplished a notable achievement by demonstrating not only the ethos to which Chu Hsi belonged, but by demonstrating how intellectual history of China should be conducted.

In addition to the thesis and content and massive evidence of the book, its virtues include excellently clear and simple writing and a plan which gives surprisingly sustaining drama to an accounting of the long intellectual development of an individual.

The vices of this work are few and they relate to the difficulty which readers unacquainted with the Chinese language and only generally acquainted with Chinese history and thought will face. Such technical

terms as those which are translated as *sincerity*, *principle*, *the mind* and *the nature* (sic.) have their own semantic fields in English and do not take on Chinese significance unless so defined. To be told that a given thinker stressed principle or emphasized sincerity is to be told little unless one realizes that the Chinese originals for these translations provided the major intellectual icons over which Chinese scholars debated for centuries in the same way that Western scholars have debated over the nature of *knowledge*, *belief*, and *the good*, terms which in turn would have had some significant opacity in Sung Dynasty Chinese. Tillman could have helped educate a broader audience had he given some space to identifying the significance of such key terms and concepts.

Nevertheless, for anyone who teaches courses that include Chinese thought and religion, Tillman's work and his striking conclusions are a must. He has changed our understanding of a major period of Chinese intellectual development, and he has shown in English how we must think about Chinese thought evolving over time.

Indeed, these are achievements.

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TIMOTHY LIGHT

ULRIKE PETERS, *Wie der biblischen Prophet Enoch zum Buddha wurde: Die jüdische Enochtradition als Beispiel interkultureller Vermittlung zwischen Ost und West*—Sinzig: St. Meinard Verl., 1987, paper, pp. 209, DM 48.—, ISBN 3-927593-07-9.

The enigmatic Enoch, for whom the O.T. has a few lines only (in Gen. 4 and 5), had a most remarkable career. How, when, why, and in what circles he was catapulted into the role of prophet, revealer of mysteries, super-angel, celestial scribe or even mediator of salvation must not detain us here. Ms. Ulrike Peters' publication, subtitled "an early example of intercultural contact between east and west", deals with the extant and not necessarily homogeneous "Enoch-literature". Milik's publications on, and studies of, the Enoch texts found in Qumran necessitated a thorough review of the Enoch-traditions (which, it now appears, were already well-known to the "Dead Sea Community") and their developments in various literary compositions such as Enoch I (Ethiopic and Greek versions), Enoch II (the "Slavonic" Enoch), and Enoch III (actually a Jewish *Hekhaloth* text, also featuring Metatron) and their spin-offs. The Enochian type of literature has to be seen in the context of O.T.

“apocalyptic”, and *Enoch* is clearly related also to the myth of the fallen angels, the “giants”, and the “watchers”. The subject is surveyed concisely and competently, although in a somewhat schematic way, by Ms. Peters. The title of the publication, clearly meant as a *captatio attentionis*, is somewhat misleading (quite apart from the fact that Enoch does not figure among the canonical biblical “prophets”). That most syncretistic of all religions, Manichaeism, also adopted Enoch and the “Enochian” literature (cf. Mani’s version of the *Book of Giants*), and on his Manichaean trek through Central Asia Enoch also acquired an Uighur name which can mean, in addition to prophet, saint, religious founder, apostle, also *Buddha*. The title is clearly inspired by H.-J. Klimkeit’s “Buddha-Enoch” article (ZRGG 32, 1986) and is reminiscent of the Manichaean Buddha-Christ of Light with which Klimkeit had dealt elsewhere. The value of this M.A. thesis (the title of which, as indicated before, is rather misleading) resides not so much in the rather incidental Buddha-theme as in the competent summary of the whole Enochian complex (sources as well as secondary literature). The author deserves special praise for not limiting herself to texts but including also iconography. The very full bibliography (pp. 160-180, up to 1988) is equally useful. What is needed now is a study of the subsequent history of the Enochian literature, and more specifically of the “watchers”, especially in the late 19th cent. occultist renaissance.

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S.A. NIGOSIAN, *The Zoroastrian Faith. Tradition and Modern Research*—  
Montreal & Kingston, London, Buffalo: McGill-Queen’s University  
Press 1993 (154 p.) ISBN 0-7735-1133-4 (cloth) £ 33.95; ISBN 0-  
7735-1144-X (paper) £ 15.50.

Nigosian’s book intends to serve as “an instructive analytical work on the Zoroastrian faith” (p. xi) but it only can be recommended with much hesitation to a very general readership. Even the undergraduate student of history of religions can easily find better books on Zoroastrianism.

In five chapters N. deals with his subject: In the first one (pp. 3-24) he describes the life, date and place of Zarathustra reaching the tentative conclusion that Zarathustra preached somewhen before Cyrus II., probably at the end of the seventh or at the beginning of the sixth century BCE

in Iran, without specifying a more precise area for the prophet's homeland. But it is worth mentioning that within the last few years there has been a growing consensus to propose as a date for the prophet's lifetime the end of the 2nd or the beginning of the 1st millennium BCE. The next chapter (pp. 25-45) is an outline of the history of Zoroastrianism from the Achaemenian era up to the present; the period after the Muslim conquest is very short focussing mainly on the arrival at India according to the "History of Sanjana" (*qissa* is consequently misspelled as *quissa* [!]). Dating the exodus from Iran to India in the 8th and 9th century (p. 42) is too early; the first leaving to India took place only in 936. Chapter 3 (pp. 46-70) introduces the Zoroastrian scriptures. I am not convinced by N.'s conclusion that some parts of the Avesta are as late as the Sasanian time in the fifth century CE (p. 48). N. gives a short description of the different parts of the Avesta and of some Middle Persian writings, quoting passages at some length, but these quotations are often from dated translations (e.g. Darmesteter and Mills, West). In my opinion chapters 4 and 5 are the more interesting parts of the book: Here N. gives an outline of Zoroastrian teachings (pp. 71-97) and observances (pp. 98-118). Although both parts are not always accurate in all historical details they are worth to be read because N.'s description is in accordance with the view-point of faithful Zoroastrians. Therefore the reader gets some "inside" information that sometimes differs from a purely historical and analytical view. Endnotes (pp. 123-132), an extensively compiled (but in the arguments often not used) bibliography (pp. 133-149), and an index (pp. 151-154) conclude the book.

The most serious limitation of this book is its philological weakness. Just some flaws: The names *khshathrita* and *phraortes* cannot be equated but have quite different meanings (p. 7). The given translation of the Avestan words *xvaetu*, *verezena* and *airyamna* is wrong, thus also the socio-historical conclusion based thereupon (p. 13). The sentence "The Arsacid rulers ... made the Pahlavi language ... the official Parthian language" (p. 31) shows that the author has only a very limited idea about Pahlavi or Parthian. The sentence "The agent through whom Ahriman works is Angra Mainyu" (p. 85) makes clear, why there are two sub-chapters on "Ahriman" and "Angra Mainyu" (pp. 84-86); but: Ahriman is the Middle Persian equivalent to Avestan Angra Mainyu, thus the quoted sentence becomes nonsense. I must conclude: Writing on Zoroastrianism—even on an introductory level—depends on at least some rudimentary knowledge of Iranian philology. The above mentioned mistakes give the impression that the author has not been fully aware of this starting point. Therefore his "Zoroastrian Faith" can give some

interesting aspects of “Tradition”, but has little to do with “Modern Research”.

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MANFRED HUTTER

JACOB NEUSNER, *Judaism and Zoroastrianism at the Dusk of Late Antiquity: How Two Ancient Faiths Wrote Down Their Great Traditions* (South Florida Studies in the History of Judaism, no. 87)—Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press 1993 (XII + 202 p.) ISBN 1-55540-889-3 (cloth) \$ 59.95.

The interrelations between Judaism and Zoroastrianism are a classical, though controversial, topic in the history of religions. Nevertheless, the prolific, renowned—and disputed—Talmudic scholar, Jacob Neusner, seems prepared to tackle this subject, having studied Pahlavi with Ilya Gershevitch and Richard Frye in the early 1960s.<sup>1</sup>

Unlike most of his predecessors, Neusner is not concerned with the quest for ‘influences’ of any kind. His approach is strictly comparative. Neusner compares neither a (presumed!) common ‘phenomenon’ of both religions nor the two religions as such. Instead he compares the Talmud of Babylonia with two ninth century Zoroastrian Pahlavi-texts, namely the Rivāyat of Aturfarnbag and the Rivāyat accompanying the Dādestān ī Dēnīg. Neusner justifies this comparison mainly because the Judaic sages and the Zoroastrian priests did their work in comparable circumstances (at the end of a long period of stable development) and because their writings attain a comparable purpose (“that of organizing and putting down in fixed and official writing a full and authoritative statement of the received tradition and faith” [19]; ‘writing down the Great Tradition’).

Apart from an introduction of some thirty pages and an index the book has three parts. Part one compares the Babylonian Talmud to the Rivāyat of Aturfarnbag, part two, the Babylonian Talmud to the Rivāyat accompanying the Dādestān ī Dēnīg while part three presents sort of a systematic conclusion.

‘Writing down great traditions’ turns out to consist of writing down rules. Neusner distinguishes between three types of representations of the rules of the ‘Great Tradition’ in late antique Israel and Iran: [1] the rule unadorned, [2] the rule attached to a myth, [3] the rule joined to its

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‘Writing down great traditions’ turns out to consist of writing down rules. Neusner distinguishes between three types of representations of the rules of the ‘Great Tradition’ in late antique Israel and Iran: [1] the rule unadorned, [2] the rule attached to a myth, [3] the rule joined to its

reason. In the first category fall the Rivāyat of Aturfarnbag and the Mishnah, in the second the Rivāyat accompanying the Dādestān ī Dēnīg and all of the pentateuchal law codes. The third category is enthusiastically reserved to the Babylonian Talmud, this text (in Neusner's opinion) being the only one to give a philosophical, abstract and rational approach to tradition, unfolding 'the law behind the law'. The Talmud of the Land of Israel, however, does not quite fit into Neusner's categories.

The reader soon comes to realize that Neusner's main interest is to prove the uniqueness of the Babylonian Talmud (or his vision of this Talmud). Moreover Neusner's idea of 'a tradition' and 'writing down a tradition' is rather restricted. For example, he discusses neither the interrelations between the written and the oral nor the role of the laymen, the priests and the rituals in transmitting (or creating) 'a tradition' etc. Nevertheless, Neusner's book contains some illuminating and stimulating observations. Perhaps it should be seen more as an introductory rather than a concluding chapter of research in progress.

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<sup>1</sup> Neusner has dealt with this problem in some previous publications, see "A Zoroastrian Critique of Judaism", *JAOS* 83 (1963), 283-294; "Note on Barukh ben Neriah and Zoroaster", *Numen* 12 (1965), 66-69; "Rabbi and Magus in Third Century Sasanian Babylonia", *HR* 6 (1966/67) 189-178; *Judaism, Christianity, and Zoroastrianism in Talmudic Babylonia* (Lanham, New York, London: University Press of America 1986).

MICHELE RENEE SALZMAN, *On Roman Time: The Codex-Calendar of 354 and the Rhythms of Urban Life in Late Antiquity* (The Transformation of the Classical Heritage 17)—Berkeley: University of California Press 1990 (xxii + 315 p., 107 figs.) ISBN 0-520-06566-2 \$65.00

After the prosopographical works on Roman priests inspired by T. Robert S. Broughton the Bryn Mawr College has continued to produce major contributions to the study of Roman religion. Agnes K. Michels, who wrote the best treatise on the Republican calendar available,<sup>1</sup> prompted two dissertations on calendars of late antiquity, which have been published recently. Elizabeth S. Dulabahn studied Polemius

Silvius;<sup>2</sup> M. R. Salzman analyzes the so-called “Chronograph of A.D. 354”. It is an illustrated codex composed of a list of emperors’ birthdays, characteristics of the seven planets and their astrological effects, lists of consuls and urban prefects of Rome, deposition days of bishops and martyrs, a list of all the bishops of Rome and some other texts and illustrations. A calendar with a full page illustration for every month forms the centerpiece of the codex. It had been written and designed by the famous calligrapher Furius Dionysius Filocalus and dedicated to someone called Valentinus. This is the only Roman calendar from the fourth century. Besides the significance for the history of art,<sup>3</sup> the codex is an invaluable testimony for the religious history of Rome, half way between Constantine’s official acknowledgement of Christianity and Gratian’s and Theodosius’ total abolishment of “pagan” cult by the end of the century.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, the historiographical sections of the codex are as important for their historical data as for the history of historiography in late antiquity.<sup>5</sup>

Salzman intends to analyze the codex within this historical context. The producer as well as the recipient of the codex probably are Christians. The content, however, includes information not only on the Christian church, but on political institutions and pagan rites as well. Therefore, it is necessary to interpret the calendar as a testimony of contemporary religious practices, but furthermore the entire codex has to be seen in the context of the religious climate of the 350s. After a general introduction, Salzman briefly describes all parts of the codex. The study of the illustrations of the months and the text of the calendar forms the body of the book (p. 61-189). The discussion matches the philological standards applied to such a task: The transmission of the codex in different manuscripts is meticulously discussed, variants in the illustrations are amply documented.<sup>6</sup>

In the last part, the author tries to integrate the results into a short, but dense sketch of the religious history of the second half of the fourth century A.D., finishing with a comparison of the calendar of Furius Filocalus and the one written by Polemius Silvius in A.D. 449 (p. 191-246). Here, Salzman is arguing for a new view of the 350s in Rome, a view which does not transfer the climate of conflict of the end of the century to the rather smooth process of compromise and assimilation some thirty years before.

Salzman’s methodological procedure can serve as a model for studies of individual calendars. In dwelling on controversial issues, I am not going to diminish this achievement, but rather try to stimulate discussion on the lines proposed by “On Roman Time”.

Three of Salzman’s tenets need some discussion: 1) The calendar pro-

vides information about public pagan religion (p. 3), it is essentially local in nature and is a product of contemporary religious policy (p. 20), its vast traditional background not withstanding. 2) By including the imperial, urban and Christian past and present the codex attests to the climate of compromise of the period; furthermore recent developments that manifested themselves in the calendar constitute a sort of secularization, that functions as a bridge between pagans and Christians (p. 181). 3) Codex and calendar have a specific function within the Roman aristocracy (p. 15. 185 f.).—On a closer view, these tenets cannot be maintained in this form (the following §§1-3). In addition, any reconstruction of the ritual reality based on the calendar is highly problematic (§4).

(1) The text of the calendar of Filocalus gives a scheme of public events that is valid for Rome only.<sup>7</sup> In contrast to Henri Stern, who used material from all over the empire to interpret the illustrations of the months within widespread iconographic traditions, Salzman declares them to be designed—for the first time in the genre—for the text and to illustrate local daily life (p. 63-67). The prove is not entirely convincing. It is not sufficient to show that the representation of a whole month by one scene or figure sometimes draws on a festival (or god) mentioned in the corresponding text of the calendar, if this festival exists outside of Rome, too. This is true for November (Isis) as well as for April (*Megalensia*: this identification is convincing, see p. 86-91). The *Rosalia* are popular outside Rome and before the fourth century. In the representation of July the heap of money is not specific enough to carry the reference to the *ludi Apollinares* (cf. p. 100 f.), it is frequent in the other illustrations of the codex. The interpretation of September is problematical. The notice *Mammes vindemia* on September 5th is just not understood, the connection of *vindemiae* with the god *Liber* is attested for festivals in October only. Hence one cannot connect the iconographically unspecified scene with *Liber* and interpret this as a reference to the text of the calendar (cf. p. 105). For the March illustration there is no iconographic reference to any festival at all. The consular sacrifice on January 1st (perhaps, p. 81 f.) is not an image of distinctly urban character: After all, the New Year's date is identical for at least the Western part of the Empire, the consuls, who enter office on this day, are the eponyms who give their name to the year throughout the known world. The codex offers the first known instances of full-page illustrations (p. 66). However, this is not the prove of a new quality in the relationship of image and text. To the contrary, the opposing pages are an indicator of an integration still missing.

Salzman fails to look for differences between Rome and its surround-

ings in order to determine what might be specifically Roman. The same holds true for the historical perspective. By concentrating on the fourth century, she assumes many items to be unique in this period, which are in fact attested much earlier. She is right to stress the astrological elements of the codex; but astrology creeps into Roman calendars already in the first century (as acknowledged in another context, p. 13). The inclusion of the *praetor urbanus* in the lists of magistrates is no indication of his enhanced importance in late antiquity (p. 41): They are already included in the *Fasti Arvalium* in the first century B.C. The development of lists of consuls into a “subliterary” genre of historiography is no feature of the fourth century or due to Greek influence (p. 37 f.): It is clearly given in a lot of municipal consular *fasti* of the early Principate.<sup>8</sup> Some of the supposed additions of the calendar are just new names for old festivals (p. 122, table 2): *Iano Patri* (Jan 7) recalls the *Agonium* (Jan 9), the *natalis urbis* (Apr 22) points to the *Parilia*, Mars Ultor (May 12) was already Augustan, the *Fabarici* rename the archaic *Canaria*; the *natalis Mercuri* (May 15, 125: table 4) is old, *Vesta aperit(ur)* is indicated already in Ovid (*fast.* 6, 249 f.), the *natalis Musarum* (Jun 13) corresponds to the *Quinquatrus minusculae*, *Tiberinalia* is just another name for *Portunalia*.<sup>9</sup> The imperial cult had been paid for by the emperor from the beginning, it is no innovation of Constantius II (p. 137); public and private aspects of the cult of *Magna Mater* and *Attis* have been fused long before the fourth century (p. 169); the same holds for the importance of *Roma aeterna* (p. 184).

(2) There is no unified calendar in the codex, that would have included festivals of Isis as well as commemorative days of martyrs and birthdays of emperors. But all these elements are present in the codex and they tend to be presented in comparable formulas (p. 44; however, which alternatives to the *feriale*-type of listing would have been available?). The inclusion of the Christian material is an important argument for the Christianity of the recipient (p. 199), who—judging by the material value of the codex—must have been an aristocrat. This is granted. The argument becomes circular, however, when Salzman concludes, that the inclusion of Christian material in a codex for a typical (why?) Roman aristocrat proves the importance of the Christian church (p. 39. 197 f.): If the distorted view of a minority is said to be specific of this minority it cannot represent the majority view at the same time.

Salzman’s argument is not a simple fallacy. It is due to a more fundamental problem, the identification of the acting groups. Who is a “pagan”? The usage of the polemical Christian term entails the acceptance of the Christian categories. However, the non-Christians form no “pagan church”. Polytheism is a multiplicity of systems that allow the

establishment of several (mostly, but not necessarily) non-exclusive loyalties,<sup>10</sup> expressed in different social contexts. "Civil religion" is not an adequate methodological tool for classical societies but it points to the problems of interpreting public, official religion. To set "Paganism" against Christianity, neglects the differences within the broad spectrum of Roman cults and obscures common tendencies of the whole society or mentality. In general, Salzman stresses the common background of her two groups (e.g. p. 96). However, in dealing with public cult (and its representation) she is rather prone to detect a conscious policy of pagan accomodation towards Christianity instead of inherent developments. In such a way the author emphasizes the reduction of animal sacrifice in ritual as well as iconography (p. 115. 226 f.), interpretes the agricultural images of the months from July to October as a product of a process of secularization (p. 115), and defines the cult of the emperor as a secular rather than religious activity (p. 142). However, if there had been a new conception of the divinity of the Roman emperor—as a channel of the divine rather than as a divinity himself (p. 144)—, the new development is not visible in the festival scheme of the calendar: stress on the ruling emperor and his house had been a hallmark from start on. Nor are non-ritual representations a new feature. Representations of animal sacrifices belong to another strand of iconography altogether; they are usually not employed to embody the idea of a specific month.<sup>11</sup> A change from the exceptional animal sacrifices to routine rites, in particular to daily sacrifices of vine, milk, cakes, incense and the like, has been observed before and without any reference to Christianity.<sup>12</sup>

(3) Salzman analyzes the position of the Roman aristocracy in terms of Price's model of "ritual and power",<sup>13</sup> i.e. she looks for public display and spending of aristocratic wealth, which would maintain or enhance the status of the *euergetes*. The concept is useful, although one has to pay more attention to local variants—Price embarks on an analysis of Roman imperial cult in a Greek cultural context only—and especially to the exceptional situation of Rome: In a passing note Salzman acknowledges the dominating role of the emperor (p. 188). However, the calendar is not exclusively aristocratic concern, even if some of the games and temples mentioned demonstrate aristocratic liberality. *Fasti* had been put up by minor officials (*vicomagistri*) and colleges of freedmen (e.g. the *fasti Maf-feariani*) as well. Lists of consuls and bishops do attest to an interest in power (p. 57 f.), but this is not restricted to the powerful, as is attested by the same *fasti*. If the euergetic model had worked, if the games had been popular, we should analyze both sides involved. The counterpart of the aristocracy, the ordinary people, should not be neglected.

(4) This is leading to the last topic. We do not get the information about daily life that—according to Salzman—is contained in the calendar. Her research displays not much interest in the social reality of the single festivals and games. She gives (p. 118 f.) a general impression of holidays (which are not *dies fasti*, cf. p. 35), but we get no idea of which priest still performs which sacrifice, who attends or even knows of it and who pays for it.<sup>14</sup> Thus, the notion of “popularity” remains a rather vague concept. Salzman is right to point out the crucial role of the emperor in defining the contents of the official calendar (p. 164), but she does not discuss the problem of how the insertion of new festivals and the renaming or even expulsion of archaic commemorations is legally done and promulgated in practice.

A social analysis of the calendar as a genre is crucial to an investigation of the type Salzman is proposing. Religion is but one aspect of the Roman calendar. Basically the Roman *fasti* had been set up as a means of regulating judicial and political activities (in the interest of the ruling elite, one would like to add). Religious activities are listed in so far as they are important for the timing: This recognition may be due to popular attendance, but it could be a pretext as well. There is no encyclopedic tendency. The “importance” given to a date by its inclusion in the calendar is a norm, a prescription, not an historically valid description. The process of feedback is a rather complex one. The book “On Roman Time” is lacking such an examination of the status of the calendar. The relevant ideas put forward are rather problematic. The official calendar is not differentiated from—inofficial—commentaries on the calendar, the literature *de anno Romanorum* or *de fastis*. Verrius Flaccus’ *fasti Praenestini*—a monumental calendar with large commentaries in the entries of every day, set up on the market of the small Latin town of Praeneste—is exceptional.<sup>15</sup> The idea of the *fasti* being a textbook in school, hinted at by Michels and largely expanded by Dulabahn,<sup>16</sup> is not buttressed by any testimony. Those cited are just due to the mixing up of *fasti* (calendar) and *feriale* (list of holidays/ritual occasions of a group, temple etc.).

Despite all criticism, M. R. Salzman’s study represents a valuable contribution to the examination of Filocalus’ unique codex. She pays attention to generic traditions of the elements of the codex, reflects its social setting, and takes even minutious details of every entry into account. Some of her results must be judged with caution, but this is largely due to the fact that studies of singular calendars by classical scholars and theoretical approaches by historians of religion are missing. Nearly a hundred years after Theodor Mommsen’s famous edition of the Roman

calendars in the *Corpus inscriptionum latinarum* much work remains to be done.

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<sup>1</sup> *The Calendar of the Roman Republic*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967, repr. Greenwood Press, 1978. I would like to thank Profs. H. Cancik and B. Gladigow and Regina Rüpke for discussions.

<sup>2</sup> *Studies on the "Laterculus" of Polemius Silvius*, Diss. Bryn Mawr College 1987.

<sup>3</sup> *Le calendrier de 354: Étude sur son texte et ses illustrations* (Institut français d'archéologie de Beyrouth: Bibliothèque archéologique et historique 55), Paris: Impr. Nationale, 1953; id., 'L'image du mois d'octobre sur une mosaïque d'el-Djem', *Journal des Savants* 1965, 117-131; id., 'Note sur deux images du mois de Mars ...', *Revue d'études latines* 52 (1974), 70-74; id., 'Les calendriers romains illustrés', in: H. Temporini (ed.), *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt* II.12,2, Berlin: de Gruyter, 1981, 431-475.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. H. Cancik, 'Nutzen, Schmuck und Aberglaube: Ende und Wandlungen der römischen Religion im 4. und 5. Jahrhundert', in: H. Zinser (ed.), *Der Untergang von Religionen*, Berlin: Reimer, 1986, 65-90.

<sup>5</sup> P. L. Schmidt in: R. Herzog (ed.), *Restauration und Erneuerung: Die lateinische Literatur von 284 bis 374 n. Chr.* (Handbuch der lateinischen Literatur der Antike = Handbuch der Altertumswissenschaft VIII, 5), München: Beck, 1989, 181-3. Cf. A. Demandt, *Die Spätantike: Römische Geschichte von Diocletian bis Justinian 284-565 n. Chr.* (Hbda III, 6), München: Beck, 1989, 2 f.

<sup>6</sup> With regard to the well arranged and extensive appendices it would have been very useful for the reader to print the text, at least, of the calendar. The folio editions of Mommsen and Degraasi (see below) are neither cheap nor handy.

<sup>7</sup> More interesting is the question why a lot of early imperial *fasti* (calendars) found in Italy outside Rome do provide these urban data—and only these—as well.

<sup>8</sup> For examples see A. Degraasi, *Inscriptiones Italiae* 13,1.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. p. 156: Of course the god Tiberinus (not Tibur: this mistake is even reproduced in the index) is not Portunus, but the festivals continue the same tradition.

<sup>10</sup> See B. Gladigow, 'XPHΣΘAI ΘEOIΣ: Orientierungs- und Loyalitätskonflikte in der griechischen Religion,' in: Christoph Elsas, Hans G. Kippenberg (edd.), *Loyalitätskonflikte in der Religionsgeschichte: Festschrift für Carsten Colpe*, Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 1990, 237-251.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. for the imagery of sacrifice J. Ronke, *Magistratische Repräsentation im römischen Relief: Studien zu standes- und statusbezeichnenden Szenen* (British Archeological Reports International Series 370), 3 vols., London: BAR, 1987; R. Gordon, 'The Veil of Power: emperors, sacrificers and benefactors', in: M. Beard, J. North (edd.), *Pagan Priests: Religion and Power in the Ancient World*, London: Duckworth, 1990, 201-231. Cf. F. Magi, *Il calendario dipinto sotto Santa Maria Maggiore* (Atti della Pontificia Accademia Romana di Archeologia, ser. 3, Memorie 11,1), Città del Vaticano, 1972, 44, for a perspective from the history of arts.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. M. P. Nilsson, 'Pagan Divine Service in Late Antiquity', *Harvard Theological Review* 38 (1945), 63-70; Cancik, Nutzen (n. 3), 73 ff.

<sup>13</sup> This is indicated by several longer quotations (e.g. p. 136. 182). S. R. F. Price, *Rituals and power: The Roman imperial cult in Asia Minor*, Cambridge: University Press, 1984. The basic ideas of the "euergetic model" have been worked out by P. Veyne, *Le pain et le cirque*, Paris, 1976; they have been employed by Gordon (see above, n. 11) as well.

<sup>14</sup> For example, there is no testimony given for the assertion that (in Rome) games in the imperial cult are organized by the imperial priests (p. 179).

<sup>15</sup> Being rather late in the rule of Augustus, it could not have been the model and instigation of the large number of Augustan calendars (cf. p. 7). Probably, Verrius is unique in expanding the form of the annotated calendar into a commentary on the calendar as a whole, thereby formulating even systematic information (e.g. legal status of the days) as entries of different days. The influence of Varro on Verrius Flaccus is neglected.

<sup>16</sup> Michels, *Calendar* (n. 1), 136; *Dulabahn, Laterculus* (n. 2), 164 ff.

WOLFGANG HARDTWIG and HARM-HINRICH BRANDT (Eds.), *Deutschlands Weg in die Moderne. Politik, Gesellschaft und Kultur im 19. Jahrhundert*—München: Verlag C.H. Beck 1993 (275 p.) ISBN 3-406-37132-9 (paperback) DM 48.00

In remembrance of the historian Thomas Nipperdey, who died June 14, 1992, this volume combines 19 articles of noted scholars at home and abroad. They are loosely grouped around Nipperdey's research, especially around his three volume book on German History of the 19th century.

The analysis of modernization in Germany implicates the search for specific holder groups of modern values and political convictions. For this reason it is not surprising that most of the articles deal with the role of the German liberal middle classes in the 19th and 20th century. In his introductory article Wolfgang Hardtwig outlines the ups-and-downs of German political history in the 19th century by using the four central categories of modernization: integration of the state, creation of a nation-state, political participation, and social justice. Nation-building was supposed to be the superior task by contemporaries. This raises the question whether the reunification of 1989 reveals a new access to German history.

In this context Fritz Stern expresses his hope for a "second chance" of German liberalism, whereas the philosophical and sceptical essay of Friedrich Tenbruck argues in favour of a deidealization of democratism. Referring to the latest developments the Protestant theologian Trutz Rendtorff tries to examine the tension between Church and modern state. He takes the example of the German Democratic Republic (GDR). At the same time he concerns himself critically with the term of "Unkirchlichkeit" (un-ecclesiasticism). In contrast to Nipperdey's interpretation

Rendtorff introduces a double meaning to ecclesiasticism: On one hand he defines it as individual piety, and on the other hand as social-political function performed by the institution of "Church". According with the meanings of the 19th century's Protestant middle classes Rendtorff actualizes their view of Church as a stronghold and advocate of liberty in the state. In this respect he is convinced of the lasting public function of the Church today and despite declining membership (as shown by the example of the GDR). Rendtorff's article is the only one giving serious thoughts to Nipperdey's religious-historical explanations. The articles dealing with Judaism do not stress Jewish religion but nationalism: George L. Mosse draws a comparison to the German patriotism of the early 19th century, and Shulamit Volkov names premodern and modernistic elements of Zionism.

The tension between tradition and modernity, between old and new leadership, is particularly reflected in the field of culture. Wilhelm von Humboldt's university reform in Prussia, described by Hermann Lübke, eliminated earlier misapplications, but tied the education of middle classes to classical ideals. So it blocked over decades the study of science. Michael Stürmer shows by the example of Wörlitz castle in Anhalt-Dessau that English landscape gardens as well as the so-called Biedermeier furniture were not introduced by the middle classes but by some enlightened aristocrats. Carl E. Schorske reports on the planning of the Ringstraße in Vienna. The questions of its design led to a direct confrontation between the representatives of Austrian aristocracy and liberalism. James J. Sheehan and Lothar Gall describe the changes of art conceptions in the middle classes during the 19th century. Both are reflecting on historicization, which was tiedly combined with the autonomization of art.

Eventually Wolfgang J. Mommsen shows that the artistic avantgarde at the end of the Wilhelminian Empire didn't present "objective cultural values" anymore, but indicated itself the crisis of liberal values and middle class-society. This conversion of German middle classes is also described in Harm-Hinrich Brandt's article about students' corporations. Till the end of the 19th century their celebrating of knightly ideals and associated forms of living was romantically transfigured and anti-modernistically accentuated. Finally all these articles show that Germany's way to modernity was not a smooth road but deeply ambiguous.

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TERENCE MURPHY and GERALD STORTZ (Eds.), *Creed and Culture. The Place of English-Speaking Catholics in Canadian Society, 1750-1930* (McGill-Queen's Studies in the History of Religion, vol. 11)—Montreal and Kingston, London, Buffalo: McGill-Queen's University Press 1993 (XXXIX + 253 p.) ISBN 0-7735-0954-2 (cloth) £ 33.95.

The editors understand their book as an emancipation-act of the English-speaking in relation to the French-speaking Catholics. For them the necessity of such a measure still today is no question. In his introduction Murphy points out, "that Catholicism in Canada has been closely identified with French language and culture, while the ethos of English-speaking Canada has been firmly associated with evangelical Protestantism ... English-speaking Catholics, if mentioned at all, are identified with the Irish immigrants who poured into the country in the wake of the Great Famine" (XVIII). A history of the English-speaking Catholics is the history of a minority (Catholics) of a minority (English-speaking Catholics—and for its part splitted in various national groups) in relation to the total population of Canada. — The discussed period of anti-Catholicism is divided into three phases: during the first (conquest until 1830), "anti-Catholicism was an official policy of the government" (as a reflection of the British constitutional tradition) which was beginning to weaken when Catholics were too numerous to suppress and the conflict with the "United States" was unavoidable. In the middle decades of the nineteenth century (second phase), "when official anti-Catholicism came to an end ..., it was replaced by a more specifically theological variety of religious bigotry ... Protestant spokesmen launched a massive assault on the doctrines and practices of the Catholic church ..."; the growing immigration of Catholics gave new reinforcement in the war against "popery". The third phase began as the "Catholics were gradually integrated into Canadian society"; but for the Protestant assimilation into "Canadian society was equated by the evangelists with anglicization and conversion to Protestantism". Until 1930 "the English-speaking Catholics reached a *modus vivendi* with the civil authorities and with their Protestant neighbours" (XXIV/XXVI). And in the "post-1930 era, English-speaking Catholics continued to occupy a special place in Canadian society ..." (XXXVII). — The leading motive of the book is: not only the historiography of the French-speaking Catholicism is vital and creative. While Murphy gives an overview about the "war" between Catholics and Protestants, the ten authors demonstrate in selected situations the special front too, the fight between the English-speaking Catholics and Protestants and the emancipation against their French-

speaking brothers of faith. But in spite of all we have to say that different language and culture (not only of the Catholics) are more separating than the common faith is uniting the Canadian society.

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## IN MEMORIAM UGO BIANCHI

On the morning of Good Friday April 14, 1995 Ugo Bianchi, President of the International Association of the History of Religions, died unexpectedly of a heart attack. All who know him personally or through some of his numerous publications are very grieved. We mourn not only for one of our leading scholars of the History of Religions but also for a remarkable high minded and warm hearted person.

Ugo Bianchi was born on Oct. 13, 1922 in Cavriglia (Arezzo, Italy) and raised in Rome, where he studied Classical Philology, Ancient History and History of Religions. In 1944 he received the Ph.D. (Laureato in Lettere) and in 1947 the Diploma of the Scuola di perfezionamento in studi storico-religiosi di Roma. From 1952-1956 he was member of the Istituto italiano per la storia antica in Rome. In 1959 he became Docent (libero docente) of History of Religions at the University of Rome. One year later he was called to the chair of History of Religions at the University of Messina, Sicily, in 1971 to the chair of the same discipline in Bologna, and in 1974 to the University of Rome "La Sapienza". Besides these official positions he also served as Visiting Professor of the History of Religions at the Università del Sacro Cuore in Milano (from 1972) and as Visiting Professor of Ethnology at the Università urbaniana di Propaganda Fide in Rome (from 1977). For a long period Ugo Bianchi was secretary of the Italian Society of History of Religions, and from 1990 he was president of the IAHR.

Primarily Ugo Bianchi was a student of Raffaele Pettazzoni whose strict historical view conditioned the entire Italian school of History of Religions. For this reason one of his main interests in the area of theory and methodology consisted in the defence of this basic concept against theological, ecclesiastical, metaphysical or philosophical interpretations (cf. his *History of Religions*, 1975, and many articles). Especially well known in this respect is his short critical report on the 10th Congress of the IAHR (1960) in Marburg/Lahn called "Après Marburg. Petit discours sur la méthode" (NUMEN 8, 1961, 64-78). His main concerns within the field of

history or religions were dualistic traditions and ideas in relation to theogony and cosmogony (*Il dualismo religioso*, 1958; *Teogoni e cosmogoni*, 1960), the relations between destiny and divinity in Greece and Iran (*Dios aisa*, 1953; *Zaman i Ohrmazd*, 1958; *Prometo, Orfeo, Adamo*, 1976), Gnosticism and Manicheism (cf. his *Selected Essays on Gnosticism. Dualism and Mysteriorosophy*, 1978), and the ancient mystery religions (*The Greek Mysteries*, 1976; *Mysteria Mithra*, 1979). His ability to discuss religious-historical and philological problems in different areas of religious traditions and literatures is based on the one hand in his excellent and profound knowledge of the worldwide materials (sources), and on the other hand in his competent and precise reasoning on theoretical and methodological questions. Because of the insight that comparative and general studies can only be done efficiently with the cooperation of specialists in the various fields of religions and their traditions and literatures, Ugo Bianchi began early to convene scholars to international symposia or conferences on important problems. Thus he organized some of the most significant international meetings in the History of Religions such as the well-known Messina-Conference on the origins of Gnosticism (1966, published 1967, 2nd. ed. 1970), the Rome-Conference on the "Religio-Historical Character of Roman Mithraism" (1978, publ. 1979), and together with M.J. Vermaseren the conference about ideas of salvation in the oriental religions of the Roman Empire (Rome 1979, publ. 1982). The last meeting he arranged as we all know was the 16th conference of the IAHR 1990 in Rome with the general theme on the term of "religion" in comparative studies (proceedings published in 1994).

On account of his internationally highly acclaimed scholarly work and activity Ugo Bianchi received several distinctive honours. Thus he was named a member of the Academy of Sciences and Letters of Messina and of Bologna. The Universities of Uppsala (Sweden) and Louvain-la-Neuve (Belgium) conferred on him the degree of doctor honoris causa (1980). Shortly before his decease a voluminous Festschrift in his honour was published by his well-known former student and his successor in Messina Prof. Guilia Sfameni Gasparro under the title *Agathè elpis* ("Good hope"). Here 35 scholars from all over the world wrote contributions to the various areas in which Ugo Bianchi was interested, in order to express

their high esteem and admiration for his personality and scientific achievement. The volume includes the complete list of all of his publications and editions between 1950 and 1993. The day fixed for the official handing over of the *Festschrift* to him on May 8, 1995, was rescheduled as a commemoration by the Università di Roma "La Sapienza". The international community of historians of religions and related disciplines mourn one of its most distinguished representatives. His friends are full of regret of the loss of a beloved, true and unforgettable companion who has been esteemed throughout long years of working and living.

Universität Marburg

KURT RUDOLPH

## BUDDHIST MODERNISM AND THE RHETORIC OF MEDITATIVE EXPERIENCE\*

ROBERT H. SHARF

*What we can't say we can't say and we can't whistle either.*

Frank Ramsey

### *Summary*

The category “experience” has played a cardinal role in modern studies of Buddhism. Few scholars seem to question the notion that Buddhist monastic practice, particularly meditation, is intended first and foremost to inculcate specific religious or “mystical” experiences in the minds of practitioners. Accordingly, a wide variety of Buddhist technical terms pertaining to the “stages on the path” are subject to a phenomenological hermeneutic—they are interpreted as if they designated discrete “states of consciousness” experienced by historical individuals in the course of their meditative practice.

This paper argues that the role of experience in the history of Buddhism has been greatly exaggerated in contemporary scholarship. Both historical and ethnographic evidence suggests that the privileging of experience may well be traced to certain twentieth-century Asian reform movements, notably those that urge a “return” to *zazen* or *vipassanā* meditation, and these reforms were profoundly influenced by religious developments in the West. Even in the case of those contemporary Buddhist schools that do unambiguously exalt meditative experience, ethnographic data belies the notion that the rhetoric of meditative states functions ostensibly. While some adepts may indeed experience “altered states” in the course of their training, critical analysis shows that such states do not constitute the reference points for the elaborate Buddhist discourse pertaining to the “path.” Rather, such discourse turns out to function ideologically and performatively—wielded more often than not in the interests of legitimation and institutional authority.

Few would question the pivotal role the category “experience” has played in the modern study of religion. There would appear to be widespread agreement among both phenomenologists and historians of religion that the meaning of many religious doctrines, symbols, and rituals is to be sought in the experiences they evoke in the minds of practitioners. Moreover, a particular mode (or modes) of experience, characterized as “religious,” “spiritual,” or “mystical,” is seen by many to constitute the very essence of religion; indeed, the great traditions are often traced back to the

“originary experiences” of their founders. It might then seem surprising that so many of the scholars who privilege the category “experience” in the study of religion are apparently hesitant to subject this term to rigorous critical analysis. Even those whose interests lie in the investigation of so-called religious or mystical experience typically devote their efforts to the elucidation of the qualifiers “religious” and/or “mystical,” evincing little interest in the analysis of the epistemic commitments entailed in the rhetoric of experience *per se*.

The notion that the referent of the term “experience” is self-evident betrays a set of specifically Cartesian assumptions, according to which experience is held to be immediately present to consciousness. It would appear that the phenomenological transparency of consciousness—what Richard Rorty has called the “glassy essence” or “mirror of nature” picture of mind (Rorty 1979)—is reproduced in the conceptual transparency of the category “experience,” obviating the need for definitional precision or critical analysis.

The strategy of privileging experience on the one hand, while leaving the term unexamined on the other, has proven particularly opportune to those who envision their mission as one of combating the pernicious and ever-present threat of reductionism in the study of religion. By situating the locus of religious signification in phenomenological “inner space,” religion is securely sequestered beyond the compass of empirical or social-scientific modes of inquiry. Wayne Proudfoot, who has undertaken an extensive analysis of this particular exegetical strategy, has argued that the category “religious experience” is of relatively recent provenance, and that it was “motivated in large measure by an interest in freeing religious doctrine and practice from dependence on metaphysical beliefs and ecclesiastical institutions” (Proudfoot 1985: xiii). As a consequence of the desire to shield religion from secular critique, the modern study of religion was thought to require the development of specialized hermeneutical tools sensitive to the irreducible experiential foundation of religious phenomena. (This argument has proven particularly popular when legitimizing the existence of departments of religion in publicly funded universities and colleges.)

The categories of religious experience in general, and mystical experience in particular, were especially influential in the construction of the sub-field of comparative religion. Scholars of religion have been aware of the unavoidable hermeneutical problems involved in applying the Western concept “religion” to traditions that are geographically, linguistically, and culturally distant from our own. The rhetoric of religious experience, predicated as it is on Cartesian dualism, allowed scholars to distinguish the universal experiential ground of religion on the one hand, and its diverse culturally bound manifestations on the other, creating an opposition that recapitulates the classical Cartesian bifurcation of mind and matter.

The Buddhist tradition seemed to support such an analysis, as Buddhist doctrine supposedly distinguished between the ineffable experiential goal of Buddhist practice, and the socially and culturally determined teachings that point toward that goal. According to one popular exegetical strategy, the whole of the Buddhist tradition is not but the attempt to inculcate the experience attained by the Buddha while he sat in meditation under the bodhi tree. Thus, Buddhist ethics, doctrine, art, and ritual ultimately emerge from, and revert to, a mode of meditative experience. In the words of Edward Conze, “meditational practices constitute the very core of the Buddhist approach to life.... As prayer in Christianity, so meditation is here the very heartbeat of the religion” (Conze 1956: 11).

Approached through this “hermeneutic of experience,” the interminable conceptual categories expounded in scholastic Buddhist path treatises, or the hair-splitting classifications of the Abhidharmikas, are frequently presumed to be grounded in a non-conceptual mode (or modes) of cognition. Buddhist philosophy, we are told, clearly articulates the difference between the “roots” and the “branches,” the “fundamental” and the “traces,” the “absolute” and the “contingent.” Indeed, the Buddhist tradition is itself often designated an “expedient means” (*upāya*) in order to differentiate it from the fundamental truth of emptiness (*śūnyatā*) which transcends sectarian or institutional allegiances. To quote again from Conze, “each and every [Buddhist philosophical] proposition must be considered in reference to its spiritual intention and

as a formulation of meditational experiences acquired in the course of the process of winning salvation.”<sup>1</sup>

Buddhist philosophical literature is thus presumed to constitute, among other things, a detailed map of inner space, charted with the aid of sophisticated meditation techniques that allow Buddhist yogis to travel the breadth of the psychic terrain. Accordingly, many of the key technical terms relating to Buddhist praxis, including *śamatha* (concentration), *vipaśyanā* (insight), *samādhi* (trance), *samāpatti* (higher attainment), *prajñā* (wisdom), *smṛti* (mindfulness), *srotaāpatti* (stream-entry),<sup>2</sup> *kenshō* (seeing one’s nature), *satori* (understanding), and even *makyō* (realm of illusion), are interpreted phenomenologically: they are assumed to designate discrete “states of consciousness” experienced by Buddhist practitioners in the midst of their meditative practice.

Scholarly writings on mysticism continue to be preoccupied with the epistemological problems entailed in the notion of direct or unmediated experience. Ninian Smart, Steven Katz, Robert Forman, and numerous others have carried on a lively debate over the degree to which mystical experiences are shaped by prior culturally mediated expectations and presuppositions, over whether or not one can separate a mystic’s report of his experiences from his interpretations, over the existence of so-called pure consciousness devoid of intentional objects, over competing schemes for typologizing mystical states, and so on.<sup>3</sup> I do not intend to enlist in this debate here.<sup>4</sup> Rather, I would draw attention to a presupposition made by virtually all parties to these debates, namely, that terms such as “religious experience,” “mystical experience,” and/or “meditative experience” are primarily referential or denotative, i.e., that their signification lies in the signifieds to which they allegedly refer.

This is clearly an important issue for scholars of Buddhism, who tend to accept the view that meditative experience was central to the Buddhist tradition throughout its history. There are, in fact, cogent grounds on which to question this supposition. As mentioned above, Wayne Proudfoot has argued that the rhetoric of religious experience in the West is of recent vintage, and the popularity of the “hermeneutic of experience” is due in part to the manner in which it seemed to offer a defense against secular critique. Wilhelm

Halbfass has made a similar point with reference to the writings of contemporary Hindu and Neo-Vedānta exegetes such as Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan (1888-1975), whose overriding emphasis on experience is largely apologetic, reflecting “the encounter of the Indian tradition with Western science and philosophy” (Halbfass 1988: 395). Finally, the epistemic commitments attendant upon the rhetoric of experience in the discipline of religious studies are patently Cartesian, and we should exercise caution when imposing a seventeenth-century European metaphysic on medieval Buddhist writings.

Buddhist scriptural materials present daunting philological and hermeneutic difficulties to the contemporary exegete. The tendency to approach the compendious Buddhist *mārga* treatises (texts delineating the stages on the Buddhist path) as if they presented a phenomenological analysis of the experiences of seasoned meditators is understandable: how else are we to approach such materials? Nevertheless, I hope to show that the “phenomenological approach” may well be misguided; in the end it may reveal more about the dangers of projection and transference in the study of Buddhism than it tells us about Buddhism itself.<sup>5</sup> For there is evidence that the emphasis on “transformative personal experience” may not have been as central to traditional Buddhist monastic practice as some modern exegetes would have us believe. Moreover, those contemporary Buddhist movements that do emphasize meditative experience often turn out to be movements that were themselves influenced by their encounter with the Occident.

It is, of course, impossible to do justice to the issue in a single article; the so-called Buddhist tradition is far from a univocal entity, and a convincing revisionist analysis of a second-century Indian scholastic text may tell us little about a seventh-century Chinese Tantric liturgy, or the poetry of a thirteenth-century Japanese Zen abbot. But while few would contest the diversity of phenomena that go under the name “Buddhist,” many still approach such disparate materials with a set of broad assumptions concerning the nature and goals of Buddhist practice.

The assumptions that inform scholarly readings of classical Buddhist materials are shaped in part by our familiarity with the living

Buddhist tradition, and when it comes to meditation two contemporary traditions have dominated Western discussions of Buddhist meditation: the *vipassanā* movement in Southeast Asia and Japanese Zen. Indeed, the impact of these two forms of practice on Buddhist scholarship is far out of proportion to their size or influence in their homelands. The reason for their stature in the West is no mystery: partisans of both *vipassanā* and Zen have been largely responsible for perpetuating the image of Buddhism as a rational, humanistic, contemplative creed that eschews magic and empty ritual. And it was this image of an enlightened spirituality based on experience rather than faith that attracted many scholars to Buddhism in the first place.

In this article I will argue the need to reexamine the conceptual categories and epistemological assumptions that inform many modern presentations of Buddhism. Specifically, I will show that the emphasis on meditative experience as the *sine qua non* of Buddhism is misplaced, and that even in the case of contemporary *vipassanā* and Zen, historical, ethnographic, and philosophical analysis belies the notion that the rhetoric of experience functions ostensibly to refer to discrete, identifiable, and replicable “states of consciousness.” This is not to deny that veteran Buddhist meditators have “experiences,” just that the relationship between what they “experience” and what they say about it is far more tenuous than is sometimes believed.

### *Zen and the Art of Participant-Observation*

In his short classic *Zen in the Art of Archery*, Eugen Herrigel, following the lead of D.T. Suzuki, assures us that Zen “is not speculation at all but *immediate experience* of what, as the bottomless ground of Being, cannot be apprehended by intellectual means, and cannot be conceived or interpreted even after the most unequivocal and incontestable experiences: one knows it by not knowing it” (Herrigel 1971: 7; my emphasis). Putting aside the obscurantism of this passage, one does gather that the goal of Zen is some sort of personal experience—an experience that Herrigel sought through training in Zen archery. After a long and somewhat frustrating apprenticeship, in which he learns not to shoot the arrow but rather

to allow the arrow to “shoot itself,” Herrigel finally has his first breakthrough. Herrigel’s dramatic account of this moment reads as follows:

Weeks went by without my advancing a step. At the same time I discovered that this did not disturb me in the least. Had I grown tired of the whole business? Whether I learned the art or not, whether I experienced what the Master meant by “It” or not, whether I found the way to Zen or not—all this suddenly seemed to have become so remote, so indifferent, that it no longer troubled me.... Then, one day, after a shot, the Master made a deep bow and broke off the lesson. “Just then ‘It’ shot!” he cried, as I stared at him bewildered. And when I at last understood what he meant I couldn’t suppress a sudden woop of delight. “What I have said,” the Master told me severely, “was not praise, only a statement that ought not to touch you. Nor was my bow meant for you, for you are entirely innocent of this shot. You remained this time absolutely self-oblivious and without purpose in the highest tension, so that the shot fell from you like a ripe fruit. Now go on practicing as if nothing had happened.” (Herrigel 1971: 56-61)

There are, of course, good reasons to question the veracity of this curious document. While Herrigel presents us with a first-person narrative, placing dialogue in quotation marks, we must remember that his archery teacher spoke only Japanese, and that Herrigel required the aid of an interpreter throughout the course of his training. Moreover, instructions were given while Herrigel was occupied with his bow, so he could hardly have taken verbatim notes. The book is clearly less a record of what the master actually *said*, than a record of what Herrigel thought the master *meant*.

Even if we are sympathetic to Herrigel’s version of the episode, we are still struck by the fact that Herrigel’s description of his accomplishment belies his own understanding of the aims of Zen archery. Both the introduction to the book by D.T. Suzuki and earlier comments by Herrigel assure the reader that the goal of such training is some sort of “incontestable experience” in which the student becomes one with the “groundlessness” of being (Herrigel 1971: 7). Yet Herrigel only learns of his success when informed of it by a third party. Herrigel’s knowledge that “It” released the arrow came not through some powerful personal experience—mystical, pure, non-dual, or otherwise—but rather secondhand, through the word of his teacher.

One might question the wisdom of beginning my inquiry with Herrigel’s somewhat idiosyncratic work. Despite the imprimatur of

D.T. Suzuki's introduction, Herrigel was neither a Buddhist scholar, nor an initiate in a traditional Buddhist sect. He was, rather, a German academic with a distinctly romantic bent of mind, who taught philosophy at Tokyo University in the 1920s.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, Herrigel had little formal training in Buddhist thought and history, and a scant command of the Japanese language. Be that as it may, *Zen in the Art of Archery* is useful for us as it illustrates many of the shortcomings characteristic of writings on "Buddhist mysticism," including (1) the poor quality by anthropological standards of many "field reports" in this area—little consideration, if any, is paid to the rudiments of "participant-observer" protocol, and virtually no attempt is made to distinguish between emic and etic description, or to separate primary ethnographic data from secondary interpretation; (2) the unabashed romanticism, replete with notions of the "mysterious East" that infect such narratives; (3) the uncritical assumption that, since the essential "experience" underlying the outer culturally mediated forms remains unchanged through time and across cultures, contemporary practices can be used as transparent windows to the past, and the corollary notion that a "living master" is preferable to a "dead text;" and last but not least, (4) the tendency to psychologize ritual acts—to assume that the cultural significance and religious intent of a particular practice is best located in the subjective experience it is intended to induce, rather than in a mode of behavior perfected through rehearsal and repetition. (Note that the final stage in Herrigel's training involved a public performance and examination of his archery skills. This task required that the execution of the rite become so routinized that the added pressures of a public venue would have no effect upon his performance [Herrigel 1971: 71-72].)

#### *Experience, Scripture, and Exegetical Authority*

First-person accounts of Buddhist mystical experiences are, in fact, not as common as one might expect in a tradition supposedly intent on producing them, and of the few premodern autobiographical accounts we do possess, most are explicitly "Tantric" in nature, rendering them of somewhat limited use in an analysis of "mainstream" Buddhist meditation theory. The

orthodox explanation for the paucity of personal testimonials is that Buddhist monks were explicitly forbidden from vaunting their spiritual accomplishments in public.<sup>7</sup> There is little doubt that such a prohibition would have discouraged the writing of personal accounts describing one's meditative experience. However, this prohibition would have served a tactical purpose as well, as it allowed the tradition to tacitly impute meditative accomplishment to eminent monks, while at the same time obviating the need for such monks to make any explicit claims on their own behalf.<sup>8</sup>

In any event, while personal accounts may be lacking, there is no shortage of prescriptive manuals delineating in exhaustive detail the stages of the Buddhist path (*mārga*). These texts were highly esteemed in the monastic tradition: Buddhaghosa's *Visuddhimagga* ("Path of Purity"), for example, constituted the central authority on all issues pertaining to the Buddhist path for Theravāda Buddhists. Chih-i's *Mo-ho chih-kuan* ("The Great Calming and Contemplation") was accorded an analogous position in the Chinese T'ien-t'ai tradition, while Indian and Tibetan monastics turned to works such as Asanga's *Bodhisattvabhūmi* ("Stages of the Bodhisattva's Path"), Kamalaśīla's *Bhāvanākrama* ("Course of Practice"), Tsong kha pa's *Lam rim chen mo* ("Great Book on the Stages of the Path"), or the *Abhisamayālaṅkāra* ("Ornament of Realizations") attributed to Maitreya-nātha. These massive exegetical works were often accorded an authority that was, for all practical purposes, equal to that of the sermons of the Buddha.

There is a marked tendency in the field to assume that such *mārga* treatises are descriptive accounts of meditative states based on the personal experiences of accomplished adepts, rather than prescriptive systematizations of scriptural materials. Paul Griffiths, for example, in his study of Indian Buddhist meditation theory, asserts that, "The scholastic texts of Indian Buddhism preserve for us an especially highly developed and tightly structured set of descriptions of virtuoso religious practice; they are therefore significant for our understanding of such practice considered as an important aspect of the history of religions" (Griffiths 1983a: 2-3). And in a detailed philosophical analysis of the concept of *nirodhasamāpatti*, Griffiths begins with the following: "It is upon meditative practice that the religious life of the Buddhist virtuoso is based and from

such practice that systematic Buddhist philosophical and soteriological theory begins.... It would hardly be an exaggeration to say that the whole of the magnificently complex edifice of Buddhist philosophy is a drawing out and systematization of the implications of [meditative] experience” (Griffiths 1986: xiii).

Griffiths, who is interested in the role that meditative states play in Buddhist philosophy, works with a set of highly abstruse and quintessentially scholastic texts. Yet he never directly addresses the issue as to whether or not the authors of such texts were themselves the religious virtuosos to whom he refers. This begs the issue, especially as the notion of *nirodha* has all the makings of a wholly scholastic construct. (Note that *nirodha* is characterized as the utter cessation of physical and mental processes—a state that would be indistinguishable from death were it not for the fact that the body, which is rendered temporarily impregnable, retains its “vitality” [*āyus*] and inner heat. A first-person description of such a state is a logical impossibility.)<sup>9</sup>

Unlike Griffiths, who, like many of his professional colleagues, *assumes* that Indian Buddhist philosophical systems emerged in part from reflection on the meditative experiences of accomplished monks, Lambert Schmithausen tries to *prove* it. In a short but provocative article, Schmithausen argues that the idealist philosophy of the Yogācāra school must have arisen in conjunction with a particular type of meditative experience: “Yogācāra idealism primarily resulted from a *generalization* of a fact observed in the case of meditation-objects, i.e., in the context of *spiritual practice*” (Schmithausen 1976: 241, emphasis in original). This is not to say that this doctrine emerged in a philosophical vacuum: “Specifically idealist formulations defining all phenomena as being nothing but mind (*cittamātra*) or cognition (*viññaptimātra*) obviously made their first appearance in connection with reflections on objects of visionary meditation. Their generalization, however, was essentially motivated or made possible by the historical background of Mahāyānist illusionism describing all finite entities or notions as empty, unreal, and illusory, comparable to magic or to a dream, etc.” (ibid.: 249).

It would take us too far afield to examine the details of Schmithausen’s historical reconstruction here. Suffice it to say that

nowhere does Schmithausen claim access to the meditative states that, according to his argument, constitute the provenance of Yogācāra idealism. His own argument does not demonstrate that Yogācāra idealism emerged from reflection on an actual experience, so much as it shows that such a position can be derived from reflection upon the prescriptive meditative and soteriological ideals enunciated in Mahāyāna textual sources. There is simply no need to trace the emergence of Buddhist idealism to experiences attained in meditative trance; idealist positions can be derived from philosophical inquiry into the status of perceptions arising due to simple epistemic error (the rope-snake analogy comes to mind), or from reflection on the ontology of dreams (as is found in the Taoist *Chuangtzu*).<sup>10</sup>

In fact, the Buddhist tradition is itself hesitant to claim that *mārga* narratives were composed on the basis of personal experience. This is not to suggest that the authors did not themselves engage in meditative practices. (Indeed, Buddhist hagiographical sources often depict these monks as accomplished yogis and powerful thaumaturges.) My point is rather that the major Buddhist path treatises do not include personal testimonials by their authors attesting to the veracity of the meditative states they describe. On the contrary, the authors seem to have gone to great lengths to efface their own voices; these accounts are, for the most part, eminently impersonal, relying exclusively on scriptural proof-texts to substantiate their exegeses. In fact it is difficult to imagine how anyone could mistake this genre of religious literature for “expressions” or “reports” of personal experiences; they are first and foremost scholastic compendiums, compiled by monks of formidable learning who were attempting to systematize and schematize the confused and often conflicting descriptions of practices and stages found scattered throughout the canon.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, they are filled with detailed accounts of the supernatural attainments (*siddhi*) that accompany particular meditative trances, including such powers as walking through walls, flying through the air, becoming invisible, reading minds, recalling past lives, and so on.<sup>12</sup>

To reiterate, it is not merely that we can never know whether or not the seminal Buddhist *mārga* texts were informed by the spiritual

experiences of their authors. Rather, the legitimacy of these texts would have been impugned had their authors openly relied upon, or even alluded to, their own experiences. Buddhist philosophers, including such authorities as Dharmakīrti and Candrakīrti, were generally circumspect regarding truth claims based on appeals to personal experience, yogic or otherwise.<sup>13</sup> The legitimacy and authority of Buddhist *mārga* narratives lie precisely in their filiality to the canon; much of these texts often consists of little more than carefully organized excerpts from sūtras and commentaries. While their authors need not have been accomplished yogis, an impeccable knowledge of the Buddhist scriptural legacy was clearly *de rigueur*.

A paradigmatic example is the *Visuddhimagga*, a work accepted throughout the Theravāda world as the unimpeachable authority on everything related to meditation. The author, Buddhaghosa, was a fifth-century Indian monk who traveled to Sri Lanka and established himself at the great monastery Anurādhapura, where he is said to have spent his time mastering the Sinhalese commentarial tradition under Sanghapāla. He then devoted himself to translating Sinhalese works into Pāli, and composing his own commentaries and treatises. Nowhere in Buddhaghosa's works does he claim to have relied upon personal inspiration or meditative insight. The situation is, in fact, quite to the contrary: by his own account the *Visuddhimagga* was composed on the basis of his study of the available scriptural and commentarial corpus: "I shall expound the comforting Path of Purification, pure in expositions, relying on the teaching of the dwellers in the Great Monastery [Anurādhapura]..." Indeed, only once in the *Visuddhimagga* does Buddhaghosa openly advance an opinion of his own, which consists solely in expressing his preference for one scriptural interpretation over another with regard to a particularly arcane point concerning the recollection of past lives.<sup>14</sup>

Precisely the same is true of Chih-i's (538-597) classic, the *Mo-ho chih-kuan*. Not once does the author of this massive authoritative compendium on Buddhist practice explicitly refer to his own meditative experience.<sup>15</sup> In fact, the same may be said for virtually all of the major Buddhist *mārga* treatises delineating the "stages of the path;" it would be difficult, if not impossible, to construe these

scholastic edifices as predicated upon the meditative accomplishments of their authors.

One might ask if it is really plausible that the vast Buddhist corpus bearing on the subject of meditation and meditative states, and the highly specialized language that evolved in conjunction with the discussion and differentiation of such states, could have emerged in the absence of any real experiential referent(s). In response, I would draw attention to the enormous body of academic literature bearing on mysticism in the West, growing out of the pioneering work of Rudolf Otto, William James, William Ernest Hocking, W.T. Stace, and so on. Few of the major theologians and academics who have contributed to this literature claim to have experienced the states they attempt to describe and analyze. One of the most influential theorists in the field, William James, openly admits to having no propensity for mysticism: "Whether my treatment of mystical states will shed more light or darkness, I do not know, for my own constitution shuts me out from their enjoyment almost entirely, and I can speak of them only at second hand" (James 1961: 299). Yet the apparent paucity (if not absence) of first-hand experience does not seem to have impeded the evolution of a descriptive, typological, and theoretical discourse on "mystical experience" in Western academe.<sup>16</sup>

### *Experience and Monastic Praxis*

I do not want to suggest that all scholars have uncritically accepted Buddhist *mārga* treatises as descriptive mystical accounts. Robert Buswell and Robert Gimello, the editors of a recent publication on Buddhist *mārga* theory, are sensitive to the patently prescriptive nature of this genre:

The various stages outlined in highly schematized versions of *mārga* may have no direct connection with any real problems or experiences in the lives of real persons. They may apply only analogically and normatively, prompting students to mold their own life experiences according to the ideals of their religious heritage. Or they may be means by which individual experience can be made communal, to the extent that common prescriptions of practice may foster experiences similar to those of one's colleagues. (Buswell and Gimello eds. 1992: 11)

While rejecting the notion that Buddhist *mārga* texts were written as first-hand reports, Buswell and Gimello suggest nevertheless that

such texts were used to “foster” certain meditative experiences in Buddhist practitioners. Thus the prescriptive model presented in the commentarial literature is rendered descriptive of the inner experience of one who rigorously strives to implement it. This position is fully elaborated in Robert Gimello’s seminal essay on Buddhism and mystical experience, in which he argues that Buddhist practices were designed so as to evoke experiences that conform to, and thus confirm, the central tenets of Buddhism: “rather than speak of Buddhist doctrines as interpretations of Buddhist mystical experiences, one might better speak of Buddhist mystical experiences as deliberately contrived exemplifications of Buddhist doctrine” (Gimello 1978: 193).

In so far as such treatises were used as “guidebooks” for meditative practice, Gimello’s analysis appears sound. Yet Gimello’s theoretical remarks assume, rather than demonstrate, that Buddhist *mārga* texts were actually used in such a manner. This is an area in which philosophical reflection must take a back seat to historical and ethnographic research. A summary perusal of the available historical and ethnographic literature suggests that Buddhist *mārga* texts were manipulated much as were Buddhist sūtras; that is, they functioned more as sacred talismans than as practical guides. Texts on meditation were venerated as invaluable spiritual treasures to be copied, memorized, chanted, and otherwise revered.<sup>17</sup>

In fact, contrary to the image propagated by twentieth-century apologists, the actual practice of what we would call meditation rarely played a major role in Buddhist monastic life. The ubiquitous notion of *mappō* or the “final degenerate age of the dharma” served to reinforce the notion that “enlightenment” was not in fact a viable goal for monks living in inauspicious times. This is readily confirmed by anthropological accounts: modern monks, at least those who are not associated with “Protestant Buddhist” revival movements (see below), consider *nirvāṇa* to be an impossibly distant ideal.<sup>18</sup> As such, the more earnest monks are content to spend their time cultivating moral virtue, studying scriptures, and performing merit-making rituals in the hope of being reborn in more favorable circumstances.

We will see below that the two Buddhist traditions most com-

monly associated with meditation—Theravāda *vipassanā* and Japanese Zen—were both influenced by recent reform movements that stressed the centrality of meditation to the Buddhist path. The practice of what is now known as *vipassanā* can be traced to early twentieth-century teachers such as Phra Acharn Mun (1870-1949) in Thailand, Dharmapāla (1864-1933) in Sri Lanka, and U Nārada (1868-1955) and Ledi Sayādaw (1846-1923) in Burma. Prior to this time, *bhāvanā* (meditation, or mental development) consisted largely of the recitation of Pāli texts pertaining to meditation (such as the *Satipaṭṭhāna-sutta* and the *Mettā-sutta*), chanting verses enumerating the qualities of the Buddha, reciting formulaic lists of the thirty-two parts of the body, and so on. Such exercises are closer to what we might call devotional practices than to meditation, in that they are intended as vehicles for accumulating merit and cultivating wholesome attitudes, rather than as devices for inducing “altered states of consciousness.”

Even today, after the full effect of the *vipassanā* movement has been felt, historical and ethnographic studies still testify to the fact that meditation plays a minor if not negligible role in the lives of the majority of Theravāda monks.<sup>19</sup> In fact, most such studies have little if anything to say about the role of meditation in monastic training, with the notable exception of a few monographs specifically devoted to contemporary Theravāda reform movements.<sup>20</sup> While such reforms do promote meditation as a central component of the path, their effect has been felt more in the realm of ideology than in the realm of praxis; the vast majority of Theravāda monks still consider their vocation to lie in *ganthadhura* or “teaching,” rather than *vipassanādhura* or “meditation.”<sup>21</sup> Moreover, even the *vipassanādhura* monks will insist that the development of morality (*sīla*) through proper observance of the monastic rule (*vinaya*) is more essential to the path than meditation per se.<sup>22</sup> Carrithers points out that the stress on moral behavior and the relative lack of any emphasis on religious experience is in fact fully consonant with the thrust of Theravāda tradition—a tradition that “considers spectacular experience as an obstacle to practice, because of the great emotional disturbance involved.... There is a profound unity in Buddhism over this question, for the objective of meditation in all Buddhist traditions is the cultivation of wisdom

founded in tranquility and equanimity” (Carrithers 1983: 19). While we do find some contemporary Theravāda teachers touting the benefits of exalted meditative experience, they are invariably associated with modern reform movements stimulated by contact with Western missionaries and Occidental scholarship. We will return to this point below.

The same is largely true of Japanese Zen, the “meditation school” of East Asian Buddhism. The word “Zen” commonly conjures up images of austere black-robed monks wholly intent upon reaching “enlightenment” (*satori*) through the practice of introspective meditation under a strict master. But such an image is in part the product of twentieth-century Japanese intellectuals who appropriated exegetical strategies borrowed from the West in their effort to rationalize Japanese Buddhism. Japanese Zen apologists, conversant in contemporary Western philosophy, emphasized the role of religious experience in order to counter the threat posed to Buddhism by modernization, secularization, and science (see below). In point of fact, traditional Ch’an and Zen practice was oriented not towards engendering “enlightenment” experiences, but rather to perfecting the ritual performance of Buddhahood (Sharf 1989). The modern notion that Ch’an and Zen monks were required to experience *satori* before they could “inherit the dharma” is simply inaccurate.<sup>23</sup>

Even in the modern period one rarely hears mention of *kenshō* or *satori* in traditional Rinzai and Sōtō monks halls (*sōdō*). Novice monks (*unsui*) studying in Zen monasteries are typically anxious to leave the training hall as soon as possible, hurrying home to take charge of the family temple after completing their minimum one-to-three years in training. The few ambitious monks who possess the talent and drive to become “masters” (*rōshi*) will remain in the monastery for upwards of ten to fifteen years, busily engaged in perfecting the elaborate ceremonial repertoire incumbent upon a Zen *rōshi*. In the case of Rinzai Zen, this repertoire includes mastering vast selections from Zen *kōan* collections and commentaries so as to be able to guide students through ritualized *kōan* exchanges. Here too, prescriptive religious texts are treated not so much as practical guides for meditation, but rather as liturgies to be memorized for ritual performance.

The picture of Korean Sŏn Buddhist monastic life that emerges from Robert Buswell's recent book (1992) resembles the pattern seen above. While it is true that the monks and nuns practicing in Sŏn meditation halls are held in high esteem, such persons constitute no more than about five percent of the ordained clergy in the dominant Chogyŏ order (Buswell 1992: 167). As for the remaining ninety-five percent, "the majority ... spend no time in meditation, and many have no intention of ever undertaking such training" (ibid.: 218). Moreover, while the Korean Sŏn tradition pays lip-service to "sudden enlightenment," Buswell notes that "a disciplined life, not the transformative experience of enlightenment, is actually most crucial to the religion. This need not necessarily be even an examined, or an informed, life, though those would be highly prized, but one that is so closely and carefully structured as to provide little opportunity for ethical failings or mental defilements to manifest themselves" (ibid.: 219).

Finally, I should briefly mention Buddhist Tantra, a late Buddhist development that traditionally placed more emphasis on spiritual praxis than doctrinal learning. Scholars of Tantra (who tend to be trained in philology and doctrinal history rather than in the social sciences), often depict Tantric adepts as capable of astounding mental feats made possible through meditative endeavor. Such monks, we are told, are able to mentally construct alternative universes of mind-boggling complexity. Following the detailed instructions found in Tantric ritual manuals, Tantric monks are said to visualize hundreds and even thousands of technicolor deities, all of which can be simultaneously held in the "mind's eye" for extended periods of time. Moreover, the climactic ritual procedures that signify the identity of practitioner and deity are regarded by scholars as the outward manifestation of an inward mystical union.

In fact, much of the scholarship in this area suffers from the all-too-common methodological error mentioned above: scholars read ideological prescription as phenomenological description. As soon as one redirects attention away from the *content* of the manuals, towards the manner in which such texts are actually used, one finds that the elaborate "visualizations" or "contemplations" recorded in the manuals are instantiated through formal recitation and ritual

gesture. Very little time, if any, is allotted for assimilating the content of the texts, or for fixing an image of a deity in the mind. Instead, monks chant the texts in unison, hurrying through each section of the ritual in order to finish it in the time allotted. This is true not only in the case of Japanese Tantra (i.e., the Shingon and Tendai *mikkyō* lineages), which I know from my own field research (see Sharf 1994), but also in the case of the Tibetan tradition. Stephan Beyer, while accepting the notion that Tantric rites are “meditations,” is nevertheless candid about the problems involved:

The ability to achieve single-minded concentration on a vividly appearing picture is the result of long and really rather frustrating practice. We must remember—and this point should be emphasized—that the visualization is performed during a ritual; that is, the practitioner is reciting a text (which is either placed on a small table in front of him or which he has memorized), and the visualization takes place in time with the rhythmically chanted textual description of the evocation.... The reading of the ritual text in the assembly hall often goes at breakneck speed, and the vast majority of monks are unable to visualize that quickly, if indeed they are able to visualize at all. (Beyer 1973: 71)

Beyer goes on to suggest that success in visualization is a rare occurrence: “I once asked a highly placed incarnate lama if he could really visualize the subtle deities. He replied that, roughly and in a general way, he could; but he added that the Toden rinpoche (the head of all the yogins), with more than fifty years of practice in visualization, could picture these deities in perfect detail and keep track of them all at once” (ibid.: 75). I also took the liberty of questioning a number of Tantric teachers, including Japanese *ajari* (empowered masters) and a well-known Tibetan *tulku* in a Kagyüpa lineage, about their own meditative accomplishments. All reported rather limited success at visualization, but they were usually quick to explain that their own teacher, or the head of their lineage, or the founder of their sect, or some great yogi of old did in fact succeed in mentally constructing alternative realities. It would seem that contemporary scholars are not the only ones predisposed to ignore the disjunction between the textual ideal on the one hand, and the lived contingencies of religious practice on the other.

I do not want to suggest that lucid visualization of this sort is

impossible in principle—there may indeed be Tantric yogis who, practicing in quiet isolation, are able to create an eidetic internal vision of a complex *maṇḍala*. However, this is not of particular relevance to an understanding of Tantric rituals as performed by the vast majority of Asian practitioners, who simply do not aspire to such psychic feats. Ethnographic accounts strongly suggest that such practitioners are more concerned with ceremony and performance than with “inner experience” per se.

### *The Invention of Tradition*

At this point some may be tempted to invoke the time-worn distinction between “elite” and “popular” traditions. Surely, the fact that *most* Buddhists practice meditation in a “routinized” and perhaps even “superficial” manner does not mean that *all* Buddhists do so. Surely, there must have been some who have diligently and energetically followed the prescribed techniques and have thereby come to experience the exalted states promised in the *mārga* texts. Surely, the fact that only a handful of Buddhists ever succeed in no way detracts from the pivotal role played by the *ideal* of meditative experience in the Buddhist tradition.

Such an objection tacitly accepts the notion that meditative experience has in fact been the ideal to which Buddhists aspired throughout Asian history. One often hears scholars describe contemporary monastic practices under the rubric of “routinization” or “banalization,” implying the degeneration of an earlier and supposedly purer practice in which “outward form” was subordinated to “inner experience.” (Note that this interpretative strategy recapitulates classical Buddhist *mappō* theory.) Yet there is evidence that the Buddhist emphasis on “inner experience” is in large part a product of modern and often lay-oriented reform movements, most notably those associated with the *vipassanā* revival in Southeast Asia, and those associated with contemporary Zen movements in Japan.

As I have discussed the modern construction of “Zen spirituality” elsewhere, I will present only the briefest summary of my findings here.<sup>24</sup> Western conceptions of Zen have been unduly influenced by the writings of a small group of twentieth-century

Japanese intellectuals, many of whom are associated with the so-called Kyoto School (*Kyōto gakuha*), including D.T. Suzuki (1870-1966), Hisamatsu Shin'ichi (1889-1980), and Nishitani Keiji (1900-1990). The view of Zen propounded by these men was based not so much on their familiarity with classical Zen monasticism, as on a particular ideological agenda inherited from the New Buddhism (*shin bukkyō*) of the Meiji period (1868-1912).

New Buddhism developed in response to the devastating critique and persecution of Buddhism (*haibutsu kishaku*) initiated by the government in the early years of the Meiji. Government propagandists, who sought to turn Shinto into a tool of state ideology, condemned Buddhism as a corrupt, decadent, anti-social, parasitic, and superstitious creed inimical to Japan's need for scientific and technological advancement. Buddhist reformers responded by acknowledging the corruption and self-interest that characterized the late Tokugawa Buddhist establishment, but they insisted that such corruption merely indicated the degree to which Buddhism had fallen from its spiritual roots. Accordingly, the problem lay not in Buddhism itself, but rather in the institutional and sectarian trappings to which Buddhism had fallen prey.

In this defensive strategy one can discern the influence of the late nineteenth-century European *Zeitgeist* that permeated university campuses in Meiji Japan. Japanese intellectuals, seeking to bring their nation into the "modern world," were naturally drawn to the European critique of institutional religion—the legacy of the anticlericism and anti-ritualism of the Reformation, the rationalism and empiricism of the Enlightenment, the romanticism of figures such as Schleiermacher and Dilthey, and the existentialism of Nietzsche. Some Japanese Buddhist leaders went so far as to argue that the official suppression of Buddhism was in fact a purifying force, which would purge Buddhism of its degenerate accretions and effect a return to the original "essence" of the Buddha's teachings. The result, which came to be known as New Buddhism, was touted as "modern," "cosmopolitan," "humanistic," and "socially responsible." This reconstructed Buddhism, under the guise of "true" or "pure" Buddhism, was conceived of as a "world religion" ready to take its rightful place alongside other universal creeds.

Proponents of Zen Buddhism followed suit, arguing that Zen is immune to Enlightenment critiques of religion precisely because it is not a religion in the institutional sense at all; it is, rather, an uncompromisingly empirical, rational, and scientific mode of inquiry into the true nature of things. The early works of D.T. Suzuki, who had studied in his youth under the German-American essayist and proponent of the “Religion of Science” Paul Carus, are written very much in the spirit of New Buddhism. In an English introduction to Buddhism first published in 1907, for example, Suzuki confidently declares that Mahāyāna is both rational and empirical, and that it “anticipated the outcome of modern psychological researches” (1963: 40). But Suzuki’s approach to Buddhist exegesis was to shift dramatically following the 1911 publication of *Zen no kenkyū* (*An Inquiry into the Good*) by Suzuki’s longtime friend, the philosopher Nishida Kitarō (1870-1945).

Nishida’s essay revolved around the elucidation of “pure experience” (*junsui keiken*). Pure experience, according to Nishida, means to “know reality exactly as it is ... without the admixture of any thinking or discrimination.... [P]ure experience is identical with immediate experience. When one immediately experiences a conscious state of the self, there is still neither subject nor object; knowledge and its object are entirely one. This is the purest form of experience.”<sup>25</sup> Nishida’s emphasis on pure experience was based on his somewhat idiosyncratic reading of Western philosophy, particularly the writings of William James, to which he was introduced by none other than D.T. Suzuki. Suzuki was quick to appreciate the significance of Nishida’s pure experience, making it the central hermeneutical principle in his presentations of Zen. Suzuki began to render any and all Zen cultural artifacts—from *kōan* exchanges to dry-landscape gardens—as “expressions of” or “pointers toward” a pure, unmediated, and non-dual experience, known in Zen as *satori*. Not only was such an experience touted as the essence of Zen, it was also said to lie at the heart of all authentic religious teachings, be they Christian, Islamic, Hindu, or whatever.<sup>26</sup> This approach to Zen exegesis has since been adopted by a number of Japanese intellectuals, including two who have been particularly active in Buddhist-Christian dialogue: Nishitani Keiji and Abe Masao.

The irony of this situation is that the key Japanese terms for “experience”—*keiken* and *taiken*—are rarely attested in premodern Japanese texts. Their contemporary currency dates to the early Meiji, when they were adopted to render Western philosophical terms for which there was no ready Japanese equivalent. One searches in vain for a premodern Chinese or Japanese equivalent to the phenomenological notion of experience. Nor is it legitimate to interpret such technical Zen terms as *satori* (literally, to understand), or *kenshō* (to see one’s original nature), as denoting some species of “unmediated experience” in the sense of Nishida’s *junsui keiken*. In traditional Chinese Buddhist literature, such terms are used to denote the full comprehension and appreciation of central Buddhist tenets such as emptiness, Buddha-nature, or dependent origination. There are simply no *a priori* grounds for conceiving such moments of insight in phenomenological terms. Indeed, Chinese Buddhist commentators in general, and Ch’an exegetes in particular, tend to be antipathetic to any form of phenomenological reduction.

While the writings of D.T. Suzuki and his followers profoundly influenced popular conceptions of Zen both in Japan and in the West, their influence inside traditional Rinzai and Sōtō training halls has been rather limited. “Professional” Zen monks typically have little regard for university professors and intellectuals who, lacking the appropriate ritual training and institutional credentials (i.e., “dharma transmission”), nonetheless feel free to pontificate on the “essence” of Zen. As I have argued above, Zen monastic training in contemporary Japan continues to emphasize physical discipline and ritual competence, while little if any attention is paid to inner experience. The notable exceptions to this rule are two contemporary lay-oriented organizations, the F.A.S. Society and the Sanbōkyōdan, on which I will comment only briefly.

The F.A.S. Society was founded by the philosopher and lay Zen practitioner Hisamatsu Shin’ichi in 1958 after he returned from extensive travels abroad.<sup>27</sup> Hisamatsu, following Nishida and Suzuki, insisted that true Zen is not religion per se, but rather the non-contingent, trans-cultural, non-dual spiritual gnosis that underlies all authentic religious inspiration. While the F.A.S. continues to hold weekly study meetings and occasional Zen retreats in

Kyoto, members of this loose-knit organization have never been great in number, and their influence is felt primarily through the writings of Hisamatsu and a few of his followers (notably Abe Masao).<sup>28</sup>

Unlike the F.A.S. the Sanbōkyōdan (Three Treasures Association) has had a major impact on Western conceptions of Zen practice. This sect was formally established by Yasutani Hakuun (1885-1973) in 1954, although Yasutani had in fact been disseminating the teachings of his own innovative teacher Harada Daiun (1870-1961) since the 1940s. The Sanbōkyōdan, which has declared its legal and ideological independence from the Zen establishment, has popularized a form of intensive meditation practice oriented specifically toward lay practitioners. Teachers in the Harada-Yasutani line emphasize a rather idiosyncratic use of *kōan*, coupled with the controversial practice of placing students under intense pressure to quickly experience *satori*.

This modern Zen movement constitutes a fascinating synthesis of the anti-establishment and anti-clerical ideology of Meiji New Buddhism, coupled with an emphasis on meditative experience and *satori* popularized by Suzuki. Moreover, it has all the makings of a Japanese “new religion” (*shin shūkyō*), with its disdain for scriptural study, its shrill polemics against the orthodox Zen establishment, its organized use of written testimonials in efforts at proselytization, and its promise of rapid spiritual progress (the “democratization” of *satori*).<sup>29</sup> Indeed, such rapid progress is possible precisely because accomplishment in Zen is no longer seen in terms of doctrinal or ritual mastery. Rather, spiritual success lies in the momentary experience of *satori*—a state that students in the Sanbōkyōdan have been known to experience in their very first seven-day intensive retreat (*sesshin*). It is significant that many of the key personalities responsible for introducing Zen to the West have been affiliated with this controversial and relatively marginal Japanese religious movement.<sup>30</sup>

The laicized styles of Zen discussed above might be called, to borrow a notion from Obeyesekere, “Protestant Zen” in so far as they strive to rationalize Zen practice through minimizing the importance of the pietistic, ritualistic, and sacramental dimensions of practice in favor of an instrumental or goal-directed approach.<sup>31</sup>

At the same time, they actively mystify the goal, now conceived in terms of transcendent wisdom and ineffable meditative experience. Proponents of Protestant Zen are often antagonistic to the orthodox Rinzai and Sōtō institutions, proclaiming that traditional Zen is moribund and the priesthood lazy and uninspired. By emphasizing the need to grasp the “essence” they justify discarding the “chaff,” a category that includes the institutional, ceremonial, and scholastic dimensions of Zen to which the laity had long been denied access.

The similarity with the Buddhist reform movements of Southeast Asia is striking. Like Zen, Theravāda *vipassanā* revivals would emphasize the decadence of the clergy, the importance of meditation, and the availability of ineffable enlightenment experiences to both laymen and monks alike. The Theravāda reforms, like the Buddhist reforms in Japan, must be seen in the context of the major ideological changes precipitated by the forces of urbanization, modernization, and the spread of Western style education, all of which contributed to the rise of Protestant Buddhism. Fortunately, the Theravāda reforms have been the subject of a number of recent studies, and thus a brief overview is all that will be required here.<sup>32</sup>

The influence of the Occident in the recreation of Theravāda Buddhism is most evident in Burma and Sri Lanka, both of which were subject to periods of colonial rule. The bureaucratic needs of the colonial administration, coupled with the spread of Western style schools run by Christian missionaries, gave rise to an English educated middle-class, thoroughly inculcated in the values of their colonial mentors. This newly emergent Westernized class found themselves increasingly alienated from their cultural roots, yet at the same time they were precluded from full membership in the society of their English governors.

This Anglicized elite found itself in much the same situation as the Japanese intellectuals of the Meiji, who also availed themselves of a European style education and had come to admire Western scientific achievements. It is true, of course, that the Japanese were not themselves subject to colonial rule. Nevertheless, the experiences of Japanese intellectuals who had gone abroad and witnessed firsthand the cultural chauvinism of the West, and the experience of repeated diplomatic failure following the Japanese military victories over the Chinese in 1895 and the Russians in

1905, convinced the Japanese that they would never gain the respect of the West despite their efforts to emulate Western ways. As mentioned above, Meiji leaders responded to the insecurity of this situation by touting the cultural and spiritual superiority of Japan, despite the fact that the forms of “traditional Japanese culture” to which they turned were all too often recast in a Western mold.

The Sri Lankan and Burmese elites responded to their colonial situation in much the same way, reasserting their traditional cultural and spiritual heritage under the banner of Theravāda Buddhism. Buddhism thus became the vehicle through which they affirmed their national identities, their cultural values, and their self-esteem. But the Buddhism of the new urban middle-class was far from the traditional Buddhism of the village. Like Meiji New Buddhism, Theravāda was refashioned in the image of post-Enlightenment Christianity. In brief, the Theravāda reform emphasized: (1) the values of individualism, which included the affirmation of worldly achievement coupled with “this-worldly asceticism;” (2) a rational or “instrumental” approach to Buddhist teachings, which often involved the repudiation of the “supernatural” or “magical” aspects of Buddhism, the rejection of “empty” ritual, and the insistence that Buddhism is a “philosophy” rather than a “religion;” (3) a new “universalism,” accompanied by a rejection of the authority of the clergy; and (4) a renewed interest in the scriptural legacy of Theravāda Buddhism.<sup>33</sup> Indeed, Pāli scriptural materials, previously unavailable to Buddhist laity and largely ignored by the poorly educated *saṃgha*, would be used to legitimize the host of reforms associated with the Buddhist revival.

Ironically, access to the Pāli canon was made possible largely by the efforts of Western Orientalists. Prior to the nineteenth century, Pāli texts were generally unavailable in vernacular languages, or even in vernacular scripts. The impetus for Pāli studies came from British Orientalists, notably T.W. Rhys Davids, a colonial administrator in Sri Lanka who founded the Pāli Text Society in London in 1881. Many of the early subscribers to the Pāli Text Society were educated lay Sinhalese who had no access to the Buddhist canon prior to the publication of English translations around

the turn of the century (Gombrich and Obeyesekere 1988: 210).

Even more critical to the Theravāda revival were the Theosophists. Colonel Henry Olcott and Madame Blavatsky, who formed the Theosophical Society in 1875, arrived in Sri Lanka in May 1880 and soon thereafter inaugurated the Buddhist Theosophical Society. This society constituted the first lay-Buddhist organization that was wholly independent of the temples and monastic hierarchy. Blavatsky and Olcott lobbied the colonial government on behalf of the Buddhist cause with great success. They also trained a generation of native Buddhist leaders, providing them with the intellectual means to defend themselves in debate with Christian missionaries. Olcott's work was continued by his Sri Lankan protégé, Anagārika Dharmapāla, who founded the Maha Bodhi Society in 1891 in order to promote the Theravāda revival in India as well as in Sri Lanka. Dharmapāla was to become the Asian spokesman for Theravāda in the West, representing his thoroughly Anglicized version of "original Buddhism" to the Chicago World Parliament of Religions in 1883.

It is in the context of this Western influenced Buddhist reformation that we must come to understand the so-called *vipassanā* revival in Southeast Asia. Again, I would reiterate that the practice of Buddhist meditation, even among the *saṃgha*, is not widely attested in the premodern period. Walpola Rahula has shown, for example, that by the first century B.C. the Sri Lankan *saṃgha* had come to conceive of its vocation as one of scriptural study rather than practice, and by the sixth century A.D. "Sri Lankan Buddhism had decisively rejected the ascetic hermit (*tapassi*) in favor of the village- and town-dwelling monks."<sup>34</sup> While there may have been a limited tradition of meditation maintained within the *saṃgha* in Sri Lanka up until the colonial period, this tradition was evidently moribund by the end of the nineteenth century (Bechert 1966). In the course of his study of forest-monk hermitages in Sri Lanka—the tradition most closely associated with the practice of meditation—Carrithers found that "of the approximately 150 hermitages ... now in Ceylon, all but a very small handful have appeared since 1950" (Carrithers 1983: 11). Moreover, of the remaining centers, none were older than 100 years, and the relative youth of the movement can be seen in the fact that the founders of most of the hermitages

were still alive in the 1970s. Even those scholars who suggest that there may be some continuity between the contemporary Sri Lankan forest-monk tradition and traditions going back to an earlier eighteenth-century revival concede that the style of meditation associated with the earlier tradition is very different from the methods popular in the burgeoning *vipassanā* movement of today.<sup>35</sup>

Turning to Thailand, Tambiah suggests that there is “some evidence of an entrenched meditative tradition ... extending back at least to the Ayudhyā period,” citing as evidence the *Manual of a Mystic*—a short manuscript most likely composed around the middle of the eighteenth century (Tambiah 1984: 70). But again, this treatise is prescriptive and liturgical in nature, and provides no evidence that there were monks who seriously strove to achieve the exalted stages enumerated therein (see Woodward 1970). Tambiah himself traces the modern *indigenous* Thai meditation tradition back to Phra Acharn Mun (1870-1949), a highly respected teacher considered by many to have reached the fourth and final stage of sainthood (*arahat*).<sup>36</sup> While Acharn Mun may have studied with earlier teachers (notably a certain Phra Acharn Sao Kantasilo of Wat Liab), the meditation technique that Mun developed, consisting of continual contemplation of the mind and body, was largely his own. Indeed, his biography suggests that none of his contemporaries were interested in “introspective” methods of meditation, as opposed to “external” methods such as the contemplation of corpses (Tambiah 1984: 84). One of Acharn Mun’s most celebrated disciples, Acharn Chā, has been responsible for training a large number of Western students, including several who have gone on to become *vipassanā* teachers in the West.<sup>37</sup>

As influential as Acharn Mun may have been, the majority of *vipassanā* practitioners in Thailand today follow a style of practice imported from Burma. Contemporary Burmese interest in meditation is itself often traced to Ledi Sayādaw (Saya Dala Thet, 1846-1923), a monk of tremendous learning who authored over seventy treatises on Pāli Buddhism.<sup>38</sup> Ledi Sayādaw is noted for having encouraged the study of Buddhism among the laity, establishing centers throughout Burma at which lay Buddhists as well as monks could study *abhidhamma* and practice meditation. A number of contemporary Burmese lay-meditation movements claim to derive

from Ledi Sayādaw, notably the tradition established by U Ba Khin (1898-1971).<sup>39</sup>

However, the method that has proven most influential—the so-called “New Burmese method”—was apparently initiated by U Nārada, also known as Mingun Jetavana Sayādaw. Nārada developed his method from his own study of the *Satipaṭṭhāna-sutta*, undertaken at the behest of a monk he met in the hills of Sagaing. “From his own experience [Nārada] developed the principles and the details of the practice that formed the basis for those who followed him as his direct or indirect disciples” (Nyanaponika 1970: 86).

Most important among Nārada’s disciplines was Bhadanta Sobhana Mahathera, better known as Mahāsī Sayādaw (1904-1982). As part of the pro-Buddhist policies of the newly independent Burmese government, Mahāsī was invited to Rangoon in 1949 by the Prime Minister U Nu to take charge of Thathana Yeiktha, a new government-sponsored meditation center open to the laity (Mahāsī Sayādaw 1971). The technique promoted by Mahāsī at Thathana Yeiktha proved to be a tremendous success; as of 1973 some 15,000 students are said to have trained there (Sole-Leris 1986: 129). Mahāsī’s disciples have since disseminated his method throughout South and Southeast Asia, Europe, and America, and when Westerners speak of *vīpassanā* today they are often referring to the specific style of practice popularized by Mahāsī.

There is no need to detail the Mahāsī method here—any number of descriptions and first-person accounts are now available in English.<sup>40</sup> For our purposes it is only necessary to highlight two features of Mahāsī’s teaching: first, Mahāsī’s technique claims to provide the practitioner direct entry into the path of *vīpassanā* (insight into the Buddhist truths) without the need for prior training in concentration exercises (*samatha*) or mastery of advanced states of meditative trance (*jhāna*). This is most significant, as the foundation of Buddhist meditation, according to canonical sources, is the development of *samatha*—a task that requires a long and arduous course of training. Mahāsī naturally insists that a focused and concentrated mind is required in order to progress in *vīpassanā*, but the degree of concentration required in order to succeed at his technique is small according to traditional reckoning.<sup>41</sup> Moreover, the

requisite skill in *samatha* can be achieved in the course of one's *vipassanā* practice, obviating the need for preparatory *samatha* exercises, and thereby foreshortening and simplifying the path.

The second key feature of the Mahāṣī method is the promise of quick results: "It will not take long to achieve the object, but possibly in a month, or twenty days, or fifteen days; or on rare occasions even in seven days for a selected few with extraordinary Perfection" (Mahāṣī Sayādaw 1971: preface). The "object" of which Mahāṣī speaks is none other than the experience of *nibbāna*. The initial "taste" of *nibbāna* signals the attainment of *sotāpatti*—the first of four levels of enlightenment—which renders the meditator a "noble person" (*ariya-puggala*) destined for release from the wheel of existence (*samsāra*) in relatively short order. The claim that *nibbāna* can be reached in the course of a month or less is truly remarkable, given the widespread view among the traditionalists that it is almost impossible for anyone to become an *ariya-puggala* in modern times. Hundreds of Mahāṣī's followers are believed to have reached the first stage of enlightenment, and many are thought to have attained the higher stages as well.<sup>42</sup> As one can imagine, this has been a point of some controversy within the Theravāda world, an issue to which we will return below.

The Mahāṣī Sayādaw method is the one most widely followed in Sri Lanka today.<sup>43</sup> The technique seems to have been introduced there as early as 1939, but it was not until the arrival of three Burmese monks in 1955, at the invitation of the Sri Lankan prime minister, that the method became popular.<sup>44</sup> (The Sri Lankan government, like the Burmese government, was preparing at the time for the 1956 celebrations of the 2500th anniversary of the Buddha's death, and the Mahāṣī method was given the official endorsement of both governments.) A number of Mahāṣī's followers have also become prominent teachers in Thailand and India.

Mahāṣī Sayādaw provided the Theravāda world with more than simply an easy-to-learn meditation technique; he also provided a model of an urban meditation center that became a catalyst for the spread of meditation among the laity.<sup>45</sup> One cannot overemphasize the significance of this development: Buddhists traditionally held that meditation was a risky business that should be undertaken only under proper supervision, i.e., within the confines of the *saṃgha*.

Prior to the modern period there was virtually no opportunity for laypersons to study meditation; indeed, as I have emphasized above, meditation practice was rare even within the *saṃgha*. Yet in the new climate of Protestant Buddhism, eminent meditation masters rushed to provide facilities for lay practitioners. They established networks of retreat centers staffed with their disciples in which laypersons and visiting foreigners could practice *vīpaśyanā* alongside ordained monks.<sup>46</sup> In order to compete, even the more traditionally minded temples were often obliged to offer meditation classes for their lay patrons (Bond 1988: 173). Gombrich and Obeyesekere consider the spread of meditation among the laity to be the “greatest single change to have come over Buddhism in Sri Lanka (and indeed in the other Theravāda countries) since the Second World War.”<sup>47</sup>

Note that the very notion of a Buddhist “meditation center” was unknown before this century. Gombrich suggests that the term used in Sri Lanka to refer to such establishments—*bhāvanā madhyasthāna*—was coined after the Second World War as a literal Sanskrit translation of the English term “meditation center.” “This linguistic detail mirrors a cultural trend: the institution of the meditation centre is an import, and one due largely ... to western influence” (Gombrich 1983: 20). The spread of lay practice in turn engendered a radically new idea in the history of Buddhism, namely, that “every Buddhist should seek his own salvation in this life, which in turn means that he should practise meditation” (Gombrich 1983: 21).

The laicization of meditation both encouraged and sustained the anti-clerical sentiments of the Buddhist reformers—sentiments imbibed in large part from the coterie of English administrators and Christian missionaries who oversaw education during the colonial period. The clergy were no longer seen as having a unique purchase on Buddhist teachings. Through the efforts of European scholars the Pāli scriptures had become available to the laity in English translation. As the laity turned to lay scholars and foreign teachers for help in interpreting the scriptural corpus, they had less interest in the traditional preaching of the monks.<sup>48</sup> Moreover, with the spread of meditation instruction in urban centers, and the widespread belief that lay meditators were routinely achieving exalted

stages on the Buddhist path, the laity were no longer inclined to look upon the clergy as their spiritual superiors. The wisdom of the Buddha—indeed, the liberating *experience* of the Buddha—was made available to all.

By rendering the essence of Buddhism an “experience,” the laity successfully wrested authority over the doctrine away from the clergy. The guarantee of orthodoxy was no longer rigorous adherence to the monastic code (*vinaya*), but rather a firsthand experience of the fruit of meditation—*nirvāṇa*. Meditation instructors with little or no formal training in canonical exegesis were free to pontificate on the meaning of Buddhist scriptures, or, alternatively, to reject the need for scriptural learning altogether. With the elevation of meditative experience, the abstruse scholastic philosophy of the *abhidhamma* came to be construed as an eminently empirical analysis of the world garnered through meditative insight. As such, one need not read the voluminous *abhidhamma* treatises to become familiar with their contents, and there are popular stories of illiterate practitioners with no prior doctrinal training who, after becoming *arahats* through meditative practice, correctly answered questions on abstruse points of doctrine posed by learned monks and scholars.<sup>49</sup>

As meditative practice became increasingly laicized, and the emphasis came to rest on a series of supermundane experiences attained through meditative practice, the ideology of meditation changed dramatically. “Meditation” had traditionally comprised the reenactment of the Buddha’s spiritual exertions through the ritual recitation of meditation liturgies. Such exercises were typically performed in order to acquire merit and attain a more fortunate rebirth. The *vipassanā* revival, coupled with the “Protestant” ideology of the Theravāda reforms, had the effect of rationalizing meditation; meditation was now conceived not as the ritual instantiation of Buddhahood, nor as a means to accumulate merit, but rather as a “mental discipline” designed to engender a particular transformative experience. The rationalization of meditation, coupled with the Westernized values of the middle-class patrons of urban meditation centers, led naturally to a de-emphasis on the traditional soteriological goal—bringing an end to rebirth. Instead, we find an increasing emphasis on the worldly

benefits of meditation: *vipassanā* was said to increase physical and psychological health, to alleviate stress, to help one deal more effectively with family and business relationships, and so on. This represents the final collapse of the traditional distinction between mundane and supermundane goals—the distinction that served to legitimize the institution of the lay-supported *saṃgha*.<sup>50</sup>

The similarity between the lay Zen in post-Meiji Japan and the *vipassanā* revivals in Southeast Asia is striking, but not, perhaps, surprising. Indeed, analogous movements have altered the face of Buddhism in Korea and Vietnam as well.<sup>51</sup> In each case, the threat posed by the wholesale imposition of Western values prompted Asian intellectuals to turn anew to their own cultural heritage so as to affirm and elevate their indigenous spiritual traditions. At the same time, these “indigenous” traditions were reconstituted so as to appropriate the perceived strengths of the Occident. This took the form of various reform movements that tended to reiterate the iconoclastic, anti-institutional, anti-clerical, and anti-ritual strategies of the European Enlightenment. As the reformers would have it, “true” Buddhism is not to be sought in moribund institutions, empty rituals, or dusty scriptures, but rather in a living experience. Buddhism properly understood is not a religion at all, but rather a spiritual technology providing the means to liberating insight and personal transformation. By rendering the essence of Buddhism a non-discursive spiritual experience, Buddhist apologists effectively positioned their tradition beyond the compass of secular critique.

### *The Politics of Experience*

In the interests of demonstrating the need for a performative approach to the Buddhist rhetoric of experience, I have argued that the emphasis on meditative experience in Buddhism may well be of recent provenance, a product of twentieth-century reforms inspired in part by Occidental models. This does not rule out the possibility, of course, that at least some monks in times past did in fact experience what we might refer to as “altered states of consciousness,” “transformative insights,” “mystical experiences,” or what have you in the course of their monastic practice.

(Presumably, this more likely would have been true of *dhutaṅga* monks—ascetics in the forest-monk tradition.) Moreover, there would appear to be ample evidence that those involved in the *vipassanā* revival, or those training under Zen teachers in the San-bōkyōdan lineage, do experience *something* that they are wont to call *sotāpatti*, *jhāna*, or *satori*. I readily concede this point; indeed, it would be surprising if those who subjected themselves to the rigors of a Buddhist meditation retreat, which can involve upwards of fourteen hours of meditation a day in an excruciatingly uncomfortable cross-legged posture, sometimes in an underground cell utterly devoid of sound and light, would *not* undergo some unusual and potentially transformative experiences.

My point is rather that such private episodes do not constitute the reference points for the elaborate discourse on meditative states found in Buddhist scholastic sources. In other words, terms such as *samatha*, *vipassanā*, *sotāpatti*, and *satori* are not rendered sensible by virtue of the fact that they refer to clearly delimited “experiences” shared by Buddhist practitioners. Rather, the meaning of such terminology must be sought in the polemic and ideological context in which Buddhist meditation is carried out. Once again, the most compelling arguments are not theoretical, but rather ethnographic.

Most of the practices that go under the rubric of *vipassanā* today claim to be based on the two *Satipaṭṭhāna-suttas* (“Scripture on the Foundations of Mindfulness”) typically used in conjunction with the *Visuddhimagga*.<sup>52</sup> The *Satipaṭṭhāna-sutta*, however, poses a host of philological problems that render it amenable to a wide range of interpretations. Thus, when it comes to the practical application of the *sutta*, there is considerable difference of opinion among various contemporary *vipassanā* teachers. While all teachers readily concede that the aim of *vipassanā* exercises is to develop “mindfulness” (*sati*), there is much disagreement concerning the precise meaning of mindfulness and the procedures most conducive to fostering it.

Debates over technique frequently employ the all-important doctrinal distinction between *samatha* and *vipassanā*—concentration and insight. It is believed that virtually all Buddhist and non-Buddhist meditative techniques and experiences can be classified according to this broad schema. Indeed, the rubric of *samatha* and *vipassanā* has been appropriated by some Western scholars interested in a

universal phenomenology and typology of meditation and mystical states. A number of scholars have adopted this rubric in their attempt to analyze and classify non-Buddhist phenomena, relating *samatha* to “enstasis,” for example, and *vipassanā* to “ecstasis,” in the hope of deducing a cause-and-effect relationship between a particular religious discipline and its psychological consequences.<sup>53</sup>

This is not the place to deal with the issue of whether or not the contemporary use of the *samatha-vipassanā* distinction conforms to the prescriptive models found in the Buddhist canon. In fact, there are serious discrepancies in the prescriptive accounts themselves: the description of the first *jhāna*, for example, differs depending on whether one turns to the *Nikāya* accounts, the *Abhidhamma*, or Buddhaghosa.<sup>54</sup> This alone should give pause to those who would read canonical formulations as ostensive descriptions of meditative states.

Of more pressing concern to us is the manner in which these terms are employed by contemporary teachers, i.e., those who are presumed to have “tasted the fruits” of Buddhist meditation. While contemporary *vipassanā* masters may employ somewhat different techniques in guiding their students, one would presume that they speak a common language when it comes to the “phenomenology” of meditation. A broad consensus among experienced meditators as to the designation of a specific meditative state, even if they disagreed as to how best to achieve such a state, would suggest the existence of a phenomenal referent.<sup>55</sup>

In fact, there is anything but consensus: the designation of particular practices and the proper identification of meditative states that supposedly result from such practices are the subjects of continued and often acrimonious debate. The only area of agreement among *vipassanā* teachers is that *vipassanā* is superior to *samatha*, as the former alone leads to liberation. As a result, the techniques and experiences promoted by one’s competitors are often deemed to be *samatha*, while one’s own style of practice is invariably claimed to be *vipassanā*.

This is particularly striking, as the tradition would lead us to believe that there is a wide gulf separating *samatha* from *vipassanā*. The goal of *samatha*, according to scriptural sources, is an ascending series of four “material absorptions” (or “trances,” *rūpa-jjhāna*)

and a further series of four (or five) “immaterial absorptions” (*arūpa-jjhāna*). These states are held to be of an entirely different soteriological order than the states that are sought through *vipassanā*, namely the four *ariya-magga* which culminate in full enlightenment. One would suppose that since the soteriological ramifications of *jhāna* and *ariya-magga* diverge so markedly, the states would be easy to distinguish on phenomenological grounds. Yet, again, there is little agreement on this point. In the living tradition such terms are often used to disparage the teachings of rival teachers: meditation masters have been known to castigate their rivals by claiming that they ignorantly mistake *jhānic* absorptions for *sotāpatti*. Of course, this is but a variant of the claim that one’s rival teaches *samatha* under the guise of *vipassanā*.

My comments here are based in part on my own observations and conversations with *vipassanā* teachers and students in South and Southeast Asia. Naturally, the teachers themselves, who are expected to be paragons of selflessness, compassion, and equanimity, are often hesitant to criticize their rivals in print. But the controversies that rage beneath the surface do occasionally break into the public sphere. Vimalo Bhikkhu, a Western monk who spent many years training in Southeast Asia under a variety of teachers, is a good example of how the rhetoric of meditative states operates in practice:

There are some meditation schools which claim that certain experiences occurring during the course of practice are the attainment of stream-entry [*sotāpatti*]. These often are remarkable meditation experiences but are in no way related to the true experience of stream-entry which is nothing other than the seeing of *Nibbāna*. Some schools of *vipassanā* meditation say that a particular experience in which the meditator loses consciousness is the experience of stream-entry. This may have some significance but the genuine experience of stream-entry is something quite different. Considering these various explanations of stream-entry it really does seem that the genuine experience has become rather rare.... The Buddha said that a *Sotāpanna* could not be reborn in the lower realms of existence and would certainly within seven life-times realize complete liberation. Because of this people, seeking security, imagine all sorts of insights and unusual experiences to be stream-entry and so delude themselves. (Vimalo n.d.: 64)

I do not know which teacher or teachers Vimalo may have had in mind; there are several that have been subject to criticism for being all too quick to confirm *sotāpatti* experiences, including

Sunlun Sayādaw, Mahāsī Sayādaw, U Ba Khin, and their disciples. Just how quick can be seen in a pamphlet published by U Ba Khin's meditation center, entitled "Personal Experiences of Candidates (Buddhists and non-Buddhists)." <sup>56</sup> This pamphlet relates the case of a European businessman, "Mr. A.," who attained *sotāpatti* after only two days of training under U Ba Khin. U Ba Khin tested him, requiring that he "go into the fruition state (Phala) with a vow to rise up just after 5 minutes" (ibid.: 130). Mr. A. performed this task successfully, following which U Ba Khin tested him again, asking him to try it for fifteen minutes. Only when Mr. A. demonstrated that he could enter "Nibbāna" at will was U Ba Khin satisfied, since according to U Ba Khin's reading of the *Visuddhimagga*, "the real test as to whether one has become an Ariya lies in his ability to go in to the fruition state (Phala) as he may like" (ibid.: 131). U Ba Khin is aware, of course, that such a state bears a strong resemblance to *jhāna* absorption, but he assures us that "an experienced teacher alone will be able to differentiate between the two" (ibid.: 132).

While Vimalo refuses to name names in his denunciation of those who confuse "unusual experiences" with genuine attainment, other critics have not been as tactful. In Sri Lanka the Mahāsī method has been the subject of impassioned and somewhat rancorous attacks in various magazines and books ever since the late 1950s, i.e., from the time it first became popular. <sup>57</sup> Traditionalist monks such as Soma Thera, Kassapa Thera, and Kheminda Thera of the Vajirārāma temple in Colombo "castigated [Mahāsī's Sri Lankan] centers for teaching unorthodox methods that threatened the true *Dhamma* and endangered both the institution of Buddhism and Buddhists themselves" (Bond 1988: 163). Kassapa Thera published a series of critical essays in a book entitled *Protection of the Sam-buddha Sāsana* (1957) that attacked Mahāsī's use of the belly as a focal point for breathing meditation (*ānāpāna-sati*) rather than the tip of the nose, and Kheminda Thera objected to the method as an illegitimate "shortcut" that lacked canonical sanction. <sup>58</sup> In particular, Kheminda argues from scripture that trance (*jhāna*) and concentration (*samādhi*) must be acquired prior to the practice of *vipassanā*.

The defenders of Mahāsī's method argued from their own

reading of the scriptures, which they insisted recognizes a category of practitioner who proceeds directly to *vipassanā*. They also cited as evidence the experience of yogis training under Mahāśī, and they suggested that their detractors “not rest content with the mere knowledge of the *samatha-yānika* method but instead practise it diligently until they attain *jhāna* together with *abhiññā*, as well as *ariyabhūmi*.”<sup>59</sup> Not surprisingly, the response of the traditionalists was to categorically reject the claims of their opponents to have realized legitimate stages on the path. Kassapa could argue, for example, that practitioners of the Mahāśī method “do not exhibit the calm, concentrated, happy look mentioned in the texts.”<sup>60</sup> Moreover, some practitioners of the Mahāśī method were believed to have suffered serious psychological problems as a result of the Mahāśī technique (Bond 1988: 170). The traditionalists cited passages from Mahāśī’s own writings that suggest that his method could give rise to “strange physical sensations, swaying, trembling, and even loss of consciousness.”<sup>61</sup> Similar criticisms have been advanced from Western teachers as well. In an updated preface to the fifth edition of *A Survey of Buddhism*, Sangharakshita expressed his own reservations about the Mahāśī method, which he felt could lead to “extreme nervous tension and to a schizoid state for which I coined the term ‘alienated awareness.’ On my return to England in 1964 I met twelve or fourteen people who were suffering from severe mental disturbance as a direct result of practising the so-called ‘Vipassana Meditation.’ Four or five others had to be confined to mental hospitals” (Sangharakshita 1980: xv).

Even Gombrich and Obeyesekere get into the act, suggesting that the technique taught by Mahāśī and the curious states that occasionally result from the technique are similar if not identical to “those used for entering trance states.” They go on to suggest that many of the monks, nuns, and laypersons who use the Mahāśī method “have been learning a technique that, however in fact applied, could if followed to the letter take them into trance states very like possession” (Gombrich and Obeyesekere 1988: 454). In support of this claim, Gombrich and Obeyesekere describe cases in which one and the same “altered state of consciousness” is interpreted as possession in one context (indigenous Sri Lankan spirit religion), and meditative accomplishment in another (Sri Lankan Theravāda; *ibid.*: 56-59).

It should now be clear that there is no public consensus as to the application of terms that supposedly refer to discrete experiential states within the *vipassanā* movement. Not surprisingly, the same is found to be true in Japan, where Rinzai and Sōtō monks tend to reject altogether the veracity of claims by Sanbōkyōdan practitioners to have experienced *satori*. (Even teachers in the Sanbōkyōdan line concede that there are differences in the “clarity and depth” of their *satori* experiences, an admission that again begs the issue as to the “referent” of the term *satori* [Kapleau 1967: 191].) The lack of consensus among prominent Buddhist teachers as to the designation not only of particular states of consciousness, but also of the psychotropic techniques used to produce them (e.g., *samatha* versus *vipassanā*) belies the notion that the rhetoric of Buddhist meditative experience functions ostensibly.<sup>62</sup> It is apparent that even within the living Buddhist tradition a particular experiential claim must be judged on the basis of the course of training that engendered the experience and the behavior that ensued.<sup>63</sup> Such judgments are based in turn on prior ideological commitments shaped by one’s vocation (monk or layperson), one’s socioeconomic background (urban middle-class or rural poor), one’s political agenda (traditionalist or reformer), one’s sectarian affiliation, one’s education, and so on. In the end, the Buddhist rhetoric of meditative experience would appear to be both informed by, and wielded in, the interests of legitimation, authority, and power.

### *Means and Ends*

As stated at the beginning of this article, one of the problems plaguing academic accounts of religious experience in general, and Buddhist meditative experience in particular, is the refusal to critically scrutinize the term “experience” itself. The English word is clearly multivalent, assuming a host of different meanings according to context. For our purposes we only need focus upon two more-or-less distinct usages: (1) to directly encounter, participate in, or live through; and (2) to directly perceive, observe, be aware of, or be conscious of. Note that only in the second “epistemological” sense does the term “experience” insinuate an inner or private “mental event” that eludes public scrutiny.

There is little doubt that a host of Buddhist exegetes and reformers throughout Asian history exhorted individuals to personally engage in Buddhist practice, rather than to rest content with mere “book learning.” This is clearly the intent of many Ch’an writings that arose in reaction to the scholasticism of schools such as T’ien-t’ai and Hua-yen. Ch’an teachers routinely assailed learned Buddhist scholiasts who knew the “score” but could not, or would not, “perform,” just as a musician might criticize an opera critic who could not carry a tune.

Again, the injunction to *practice* Zen—to embody or instantiate the Buddha-dharma by participation in monastic ceremony and ritual—is not equivalent to the injunction to attain some sort of enlightenment experience. Contrary to popular belief, the Ch’an/Zen tradition was deeply suspicious of strategies that extolled “inner experience.” An emphasis on personal and necessarily transient mental events reduces the sophisticated dialectic of Ch’an/Zen doctrine and praxis to a mere “means” or a set of techniques intended to inculcate such experiences. The reduction of practice to means is, in classical Ch’an terms, the sin of “gradualism” which errs in reifying Buddhahood. Not only do gradualist positions tend to reinforce craving and attachment (e.g., attachment to the path, or to the “goal” of enlightenment), but ironically, an instrumental approach to practice can actually serve to mitigate the need for practice altogether. This occurs the moment the notion that “the raft may be left behind upon reaching the other shore” is married to the Mahāyāna doctrine of universal and immanent Buddhahood. (If practice is merely a means to attain Buddhahood, and if we are all already Buddhas, then there is ultimately no need for religious training.) This is the “Alan Watts heresy,” the logic of which renders all practice a form of attachment. While this position may pose as radical subitism, in reality it bespeaks of what traditional Ch’an exegetes would consider a misguided attempt to extirpate the gap between the two truths.<sup>64</sup>

There are, of course, a few premodern Ch’an and Zen masters who do appear to have emphasized a “flash of insight” or “moment of enlightenment” in their teaching, notably the Sung master Ta-hui Tsung-kao (1089-1163), and the Tokugawa Rinzai reformer inspired by Ta-hui, Hakuin Ekaku (1686-1769). A

detailed analysis of their teachings lies beyond the scope of this article. Suffice it to say that these two influential masters had a host of lay disciples, many of whom were prominent scholars and aristocrats with no formal affiliation with Buddhism. The emphasis on a transformative moment of insight is found not so much in the sermons delivered by these masters to their monastic congregations, as in letters and essays written for their lay disciples. The stress on “spiritual experience” found in their writings appear to be accommodations to the laity—a means of making Buddhist “wisdom” accessible to students who had neither the time nor the opportunity to participate in formal monastic training. Such “conversion experiences” might be fine for lay patrons, but they were never considered full-fledged substitutes for monastic discipline.

There are thus interesting parallels between the strategies used by Ta-hui and Hakuin for handling lay disciples, and the strategies employed by the leaders of the modern lay-meditation movements examined above. By rendering Buddhist wisdom a mental event as opposed to an acquired skill, the rigors of monastic training could be circumvented. Moreover, in an age that construes religious ritual as “bad science,” Buddhist religious discipline could be reconfigured as psychotherapy: Buddhist practice is thus rendered a rational attempt to alter our perception and response to the world, rather than a “magical” attempt to alter the world as such.

This strategy has enjoyed considerable success, not only in adapting Buddhism for survival in an increasingly urbanized and secularized Asia, but also in winning respectability for Buddhism among a variety of Western intellectuals and scholars. Westerners were attracted to Buddhism and Buddhist meditation by the promise of epistemological certainty acquired through systematic meditative training leading to exalted numinous states. The rhetoric of *upāya* (skillful means) provided Western enthusiasts with the tool they needed to shape Buddhism to their own liking: since the scriptural, ritual, and institutional forms of Buddhism were mere “skillful means” they could be abandoned at will once the centrality of meditative experience was fully appreciated.

Historians of Buddhism must be particularly circumspect in wielding the hermeneutic of *upāya*. The concept was first used to justify the intentional misreading of the early Buddhist canon in

order to appropriate and subordinate Hīnayāna teachings to the new Mahāyāna revelation. The rhetorical maneuver of *upāya* inevitably lies in the interests of a hegemonic and universalizing discourse—invoking *upāya* allows the usurper to disavow difference and rupture, while arrogating the right to speak for the displaced other. (“The Buddha did not really mean what he said. What he meant was...”) Scholars of Buddhism must be wary lest such patently “theological” strategies come to substitute for critical historiographic and ethnographic reconstruction.

### *The Indeterminacy of Experience*

The urge to reduce the goal of Buddhist praxis to a mode of non-discursive experience would seem to arise when alternative strategies of legitimation, such as the appeal to institutional or scriptural authority, prove inadequate. Breakdowns in traditional systems of authority may in turn result from a variety of historical and socioeconomic circumstances. The situation encountered repeatedly above involved an Asian nation coming into sustained contact with the culture, science, and philosophy of the West. Such contact brought in its wake the scourge of cultural relativism. By privileging private spiritual experience Buddhist apologists sought to secure the integrity of Buddhism by grounding it in a trans-cultural, trans-historical reality immune to the relativist critique.

The central feature of private experience that allowed it to play this role is precisely its unremitting indeterminacy. Indeed, Buddhist meditative experience is often circumscribed in terms of its “non-discursive” or “non-intellectual” character. (Note the mischief at work here: the fact that nothing can be said of a particular experience—i.e., its ineffability—cannot in and of itself constitute a delimiting characteristic.) At the same time, the rhetoric of experience tacitly posits a “place” where signification comes to an end, variously styled “mind,” “pure consciousness,” the “mirror of nature,” or what have you. The category “experience” is, in essence, a mere placeholder that entails a substantive if indeterminate terminus for the relentless deferral of meaning. And this is precisely what makes the term so amenable to Buddhist ideological appropriation.

The Buddhist strategy involves extolling experience as a superior form of knowledge, i.e., superior to “second-hand” knowledge gleaned from teachers or texts. Second-hand knowledge is invariably fickle, being subject to the vagaries of interpretation, not to mention the threat of empirical refutation. In contrast, first-hand experience—construed as that which is “immediately present”—is both irrefutable and indubitable. Indeed, one of the defining characteristics of Buddhist “enlightenment experiences,” according to traditional sources, is precisely the elimination of doubt. Yet ironically, such certainty can be gained only at the expense of discursive meaning and signification. This contributes to the confusions and controversies that plague many of the modern Buddhist revival movements mentioned above.

One way to mask the indeterminacy of “private mental events” is by insisting on an isomorphic relationship between meditative procedure and meditative experience. We have seen that the identification of a particular altered state is often determined by a critical appraisal of the technique that occasioned it. Moreover, contemporary exegetes use terms such as *vīpaśsanā* and *samatha* to refer both to specific meditative techniques and to the states they supposedly engender, thereby finessing the logical gap that separates them. In etic terms, Buddhist meditation might best be seen as the ritualization of experience: it doesn’t engender a specific experiential state so much as it *enacts* it. In this sense Buddhist *mārga* treatises are not so much maps of inner psychic space as they are scripts for the performance of an eminently public religious drama.

The public nature of Buddhist meditative ritual is readily confirmed when we attend to the emphasis placed on the formal authentication and certification of so-called enlightenment experiences—a convention somewhat at odds with the dogma that enlightenment obviates doubt. The legitimacy and orthodoxy of a particular meditative experience is guaranteed not only by strict adherence to prescribed technique, but also by ceremonial acts intended to “authorize” or “certify” one’s spiritual accomplishment to the community at large. In sects where experience has become the exclusive criteria for assessing one’s spiritual development (as opposed to doctrinal learning, ritual mastery, or vocational maturity), such rituals take on paramount importance. Thus

the Sanbōkyōdan has instituted a ritual held at the end of meditation retreats in which those who experienced *satori* are brought before the entire congregation and later presented with a diploma certifying their accomplishment.

In Southeast Asia authentication often requires the complicity of scriptural exegetes who are called upon to attest to the orthodoxy of one's meditative accomplishment. Buddhist saints (meditation virtuosos) are examined on their spontaneous apprehension of Buddhist doctrine—an apprehension supposedly gained not through prolonged textual study but rather through their direct perception of the workings of psycho-physical reality. There is thus a symbiotic if not collusive relationship between specialists in doctrine and specialists in meditation: while meditation masters require scholar-monks to attest to the legitimacy of their experiences, scholar-monks need meditation masters to experientially verify the truth of the teachings enshrined in the scriptures. In this case the rhetoric of experience is wielded in a ritualized examination that does not wrest control from the scripturalists, but rather bears witness to the “empirical” foundations of the canonical tradition.

Such public enactments of enlightenment—ceremonial affirmations of the reality of *nirvāṇa* in the here and now—constitute the proper domain in which to situate the Buddhist rhetoric of experience. Whatever ineffable experiences might transpire in the minds of Buddhist meditators, such events do not, and indeed cannot, impinge upon the ideologically charged public discourse concerning experience and enlightenment. This brings us back to Frank Ramsey's laconic critique of Wittgenstein which I used as an epigraph to this article: “what we can't say we can't say and we can't whistle either.” The Buddhists, it would seem, are no better at whistling than are we.

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<sup>1</sup> Conze 1967: 213. Conze is confident enough to declare that he "cannot imagine any scholar wishing to challenge this methodological postulate."

<sup>2</sup> While I use the more "generic" Sanskrit here (*śamatha*, *vipaśyanā*, etc.), when dealing with contemporary Theravāda reform movements below I use the equivalent Pāli terms (*samatha*, *vipassanā*).

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, the essays in Katz ed. 1978, 1983, and 1992; Forman ed. 1990; as well as Barnard 1992; Forman 1993; Katz 1982 and 1985; King 1988; Proudfoot 1985; Scholem 1969: 5-31; Shear 1994; and Smart 1977.

<sup>4</sup> In so far as Buddhist material can be seen as contributing to this debate, I feel that Gimello has cogently shown that advanced Buddhist meditation involves a discriminative or analytic component; Buddhist *vipaśyanā* meditation "consists in the meditatively intensified reflection upon the basic categories of Buddhist doctrine and in the application of them to the data of meditative experience.... The final key to liberation for the Buddhist lies with this analytic destruction of false views (Gimello 1978: 188; see also Gimello 1983). I will briefly return to Gimello's analysis below.

<sup>5</sup> On projection and transference in the study of Buddhism see esp. the analysis in Faure 1991.

<sup>6</sup> Apropos of Herrigel's "romanticism," note that he joined the Nazi party soon after his return to Germany, and he remained loyal to the Nazi cause throughout the course of the war (Scholem 1961: 96).

<sup>7</sup> This constitutes number 7 in the Mahāsāṃghika list of *pācattika* offenses, and number 8 in the corresponding Mūlasarvāstivādin list of *pāyantika* offenses (Prebish 1975: 74-75). On the effects of this prohibition in contemporary Sōn monasticism see Buswell 1992: 10.

<sup>8</sup> John Strong makes the same point with regard to the Buddhist *duṣkṛta* offence, which prohibits Buddhist monks from performing magical feats in public (Strong 1979: 75); see also the discussion in Faure 1991: 103.

<sup>9</sup> For a full account see Griffiths 1986 and 1990.

<sup>10</sup> There are, of course, several varieties of Western idealism that share aspects of Mahāyāna idealism, yet that make no appeal to privileged meditative insight (Berkeley and Hegel come to mind). Note that Schmithausen goes on to cite the *Pratyutpannasamādhisūtra* in support of his thesis, paraphrasing from the text as follows: "Just as a man, awaking from a dream, comprehends that all phenomena are illusory like dream visions, in the same way the reflection of the Bodhisattva who understands that in his meditation he did not really meet the Buddha culminates in the intuition of universal ideality" (Schmithausen 1976: 246). Remarkably, Schmithausen cites this text in support of his claim that, "the thesis of universal idealism originated from the *generalization* of a situation observed in the case of objects visualized in meditative concentration, i.e., in the context of *spiritual practice*" (ibid.: 247). Yet this scripture suggests quite the opposite, in so far as it succeeds in explicating a doctrinal point by drawing an analogy to dreaming—an experience common to all irrespective of one's spiritual practice.

<sup>11</sup> I am not the first to draw attention to this; Donald Lopez and Johannes Bronkhorst have made similar observations concerning the nature of Buddhist tex-

tual sources (see Lopez 1992: 148, and Bronkhorst 1993). This remains a minority position, however, among scholars of Indo-Tibetan Buddhism.

<sup>12</sup> A relatively comprehensive list of such attainments can be found in the *Iddhividha-niddesa* chapter of the *Visuddhimagga*; see Buddhaghosa 1976: 409-471.

<sup>13</sup> See the comments in Halbfass 1988: 393.

<sup>14</sup> See Buddhaghosa 1976: 1.477, and the translator's comments, p. xix.

<sup>15</sup> See the comments to this effect in McRae 1992: 349. Note that Chih-i's editor, Kuan-ting (561-632), is now considered to have had a major role in shaping this text, drawing freely from the writings of the San-lun exegete Chi-tsang (549-623). Kuan-ting's preface claims that Chih-i expounded on the dharma teachings that Chih-i "practiced in his own mind" (T.1911: 46.1b13). No such claim, however, is to be found in the body of the work itself. Moreover, orthodox T'ien-t'ai commentators concede that Chih-i did not attain a particularly high spiritual rank during his lifetime. (See, for example, Chan-jan's *Chih-kuan fu-hsing ch'uan-hung chüeh*, T.1912: 46.148c11-12.)

<sup>16</sup> It is noteworthy that the few major figures in this area who do claim to speak from personal experience, such as Aldous Huxley, tend to rely upon psychotropic drugs to induce their "mystical experiences." In the current context this begs the issue—there is no *prima facie* reason to associate drug-induced "altered states of consciousness" with the purported goals of Buddhist praxis.

<sup>17</sup> On the manner in which Buddhist sūtras were treated as cult objects see esp. Schopen 1975.

<sup>18</sup> See, for example, Carrithers 1983: 222-223, and Gombrich 1971: 322.

<sup>19</sup> Gombrich 1971: 322; see also the overviews in Bunnag 1973; Gunawardana 1979; Malalagoda 1976; Mendelson 1975; Obeyesekere 1981; Spiro 1970; and Tambiah 1970, 1976, and 1984.

<sup>20</sup> See, for example, Bond 1988; Carrithers 1983; and Gombrich and Obeyesekere 1988.

<sup>21</sup> On this traditional distinction see esp. Gombrich 1971: 269.

<sup>22</sup> See Carrithers 1983: 19. Carrithers is to be lauded for debunking the notion that "the founding of the hermitages [in Sri Lanka] was informed by the monks' experience in meditation." He says that this "totally wrong" presupposition "rests upon the notion of the primacy of religious experiences, preferably spectacular ones, as the origin and legitimation of religious action. But this presupposition has a natural home, not in Buddhism, but in Christian and especially Protestant Christian movements, which prescribe a radical conversion experience as the basis of Church membership" (ibid.: 18). Carrithers equivocates, however, when he comes to analyze the nature of Theravāda meditation techniques. On the one hand, he rejects "an extreme view of the ineffability of the spoken word and of the uniqueness of experience, or of historical relativity" (ibid.: 223-224), and he seems willing to accept certain fundamental claims made on behalf of the Theravāda system: "To practice insight meditation is to see—or perhaps better, to *discover*—the psychological realities described in Buddhist doctrine in one's own experience" (ibid.: 226). On the other hand, he concedes that there are difficulties entailed in "connecting [Buddhist] doctrinal categories with immediate experience" (ibid.: 229).

<sup>23</sup> As William Bodiford has pointed out, Manzan Dōhaku (1636-1714), the Tokugawa Sōtō reformer, cited none other than the founder of Japanese Sōtō Zen, Dōgen (1200-1253), when arguing that "dharma transmission can occur whether or not the disciple is enlightened" (Bodiford 1991: 144). Manzan further rejected the notion of a "self-enlightened Zen Master," since this would imply a rejection

of the central Buddhist teaching of causality (*ibid.*). It would be a mistake to think of Manzan's reforms as the unfortunate result of a long process of "routinization" or "ritualization": the fact is that Ch'an/Zen "dharma inheritance" entailed the transmission of nothing less than the Buddha-mind, which, according to the logic of Ch'an/Zen doctrine, is already possessed by all. As such, formal transmission actually involved the ritual investiture of a student in an institutionally certified genealogy (see Foulk and Sharf 1993/94).

<sup>24</sup> Sections of the following discussion on Meiji Buddhism and D.T. Suzuki's "Zen" are taken directly from my article "The Zen of Japanese Nationalism" (Sharf 1995a); see also Sharf 1995b.

<sup>25</sup> Nishida 1965-66: 1.9; trans. Dilworth 1969: 95-96.

<sup>26</sup> This exalted experience was also, according to Suzuki, the essence of all Japanese cultural artifacts—a claim that had the effect of "spiritualizing" the nation as a whole. See the full discussion in Sharf 1995a.

<sup>27</sup> The Society's name was arrived at as follows: "'F' stands for the Formless self awakening itself, 'A' for taking the standpoint of All humankind, and 'S' for creating Suprahistorical history" (*FAS Society Journal* Autumn 1987, 18).

<sup>28</sup> A more comprehensive description of the F.A.S. society can be found in Sharf 1995a.

<sup>29</sup> See Sharf n.d. for a full discussion of these issues.

<sup>30</sup> Yasutani himself took a great interest in training Westerners, and his interest was continued by his successor, Yamada Kōun (1907-1989). Both Yasutani and Yamada made a number of trips to the West, certifying many Western disciples as authorized teachers in their lineage. The Zen teachings of H.M. Enomiyā-Lassalle (1898-1990), Philip Kapleau (1912-), Robert Aitken (1917-), Maezumi Taizan (1930-), and Eido Tai Shimano (1932-), bear the imprint of Yasutani's tutelage. Enomiyā-Lassalle was the first to hold Zen retreats in Germany, and continued to be active as a Zen teacher in Europe and Japan until his death in 1990. The latter four each went on to establish Zen training centers in the United States.

<sup>31</sup> Obeyesekere coined the term "Protestant Buddhism" in 1970 in a discussion of the revival of Theravāda in late nineteenth-century Ceylon (Obeyesekere 1970).

<sup>32</sup> See esp. Bond 1988; Carothers 1983; Gombrich and Obeyesekere 1988; and Malalgoda 1976.

<sup>33</sup> For a detailed analysis of the characteristics of the Theravāda reforms see esp. Ames 1963; Bond 1988; and Gombrich and Obeyesekere 1988.

<sup>34</sup> Tambiah 1984: 54, citing Rahula 1956: 158.

<sup>35</sup> The earlier revival was stimulated by monks coming to Sri Lanka from Siam to teach meditation. The techniques would have involved contemplation of the qualities of the Buddha, contemplation of the thirty-two parts of the body, and so on. See the comments in Gombrich 1971: 281-282, and Tambiah 1984: 58-59.

<sup>36</sup> See his biography in Phra Acharn Maha Boowa Hyanasampanno 1976, and the study by Tambiah 1984: 81-110.

<sup>37</sup> Among them are Jack Kornfield, author of *Living Buddhist Masters* (1977), and Sumedho Bhikku, founder of Chithurst Forest Monastery in Hampshire, England. See also Ward 1990, for an engaging account of daily life in a branch monastery established by Acharn Chā specifically for training foreigners.

<sup>38</sup> A brief biography and English translations of eight of his manuals can be found in Ledi Sayadaw 1965.

<sup>39</sup> U Ba Khin, who served in a number of important posts in U Nu's post-independence government, studied meditation under the layman Saya Thet Gyi,

a student of Ledi Sayādaw. U Ba Khin apparently experimented with different techniques throughout his career, all of which focused primarily on bodily sensations. He established a small meditation center in a suburb of Rangoon in 1952, where he trained lay Burmese as well as foreigners. Due to the influence of some of his foreign disciples, his technique has become far better known in the West than it is in his native Burma. S.N. Goenka (1924- ) has been particularly active, establishing meditation centers in India, America, and Australia, and leading lay retreats throughout the world. For brief biographies of U Ba Khin and Goenka, as well as descriptions of their technique, see King 1980: 125-132; Nottingham 1960; and Sole-Leris 1986: 136-153.

<sup>40</sup> See for example, Kornfield 1977: 51-81; Mahāsi Sayādaw 1971; Nyanaponika 1970 and 1972; and Shattock 1972.

<sup>41</sup> Practitioners of Mahāsi's method need only reach the stage of "access- or Neighbourhood-Concentration" (*upacāra-samādhi*; Nyanaponika 1970: 89).

<sup>42</sup> Mahāsi Sayādaw seems to have considered the attainment of *sotāpatti* a necessary and sufficient condition for becoming an "authorized" teacher of his method. Given the fact that many who attain *sotāpatti* possess neither the time nor the inclination to become teachers, the large number of Mahāsi disciples who are in fact teaching throughout the world illustrates just how common *sotāpatti* has become in the "Mahāsi school."

<sup>43</sup> Note that Anagārika Dharmapāla had previously tried to "revive" meditation on the basis of textual materials. He had come upon the *Manual of a Mystic* in 1892, and used that text along with others in formulating his own system of meditation which he then propagated among his lay followers. See Carrithers 1983: 240, and Gombrich and Obeyesekere 1988: 237-238.

<sup>44</sup> For an account of the meditation revival in Ceylon see esp. Gombrich 1983; Carrithers 1983: 222-246; and Gombrich and Obeyesekere 1988: 238.

<sup>45</sup> One of the prominent Mahāsi centers in Sri Lanka, opened in 1956 at Kanduboda, provides meditation classes in English as well as Sinhalese, making the practice available to foreigners as well (Gombrich and Obeyesekere 1988: 238).

<sup>46</sup> Although I have mentioned only a handful of contemporary teachers above, the reader should keep in mind that there are several dozen prominent teachers active in Burma, Thailand, and Sri Lanka, many of whom propagate techniques of their own devising based on their personal practice as well as their knowledge of Buddhist scriptural sources. Many such teachers, including Sunlun Sayādaw (1878-1952) in Burma, and Achaan Buddhadasa (1906-1993) in Thailand, have considerable followings.

<sup>47</sup> Gombrich and Obeyesekere 1988: 237; see also Swearer 1970.

<sup>48</sup> Bond 1988: 183. Gombrich and Obeyesekere note that "What is printed in Sinhala in newspapers, books, and above all in school textbooks derives largely from the English-language Orientalist view of Buddhism" (1988: 448). Bond similarly notes that "Sinhalese Buddhists accept these foreign teachers and their ideas in the same way and for the same reason that earlier Buddhists accepted Colonel Olcott: Because foreigners who espouse one's own tradition enhance its credibility and increase one's appreciation of it" (Bond 1988: 191).

<sup>49</sup> One such case is that of Sunlun Sayādaw (born Maung Kyaw Din); see the account in Kornfield 1977: 85, and King 1980: 138.

<sup>50</sup> See the comments in Gombrich and Obeyesekere 1988: 237, and 273.

<sup>51</sup> On nineteenth-century *saṃgha* reforms in Korea see Buswell 1992: 25-30. The Korean reforms, which were stimulated by the "New Buddhism" of Japan as well as by anti-colonialist (anti-Japanese) sentiments, were led by intellectuals

such Han Yongun (1879-1944). Buswell notes that Yongun's vision of reform was profoundly influenced by both his study of Western thought and his travels abroad. Like his Meiji counterparts, Yongun came to see the Korean Buddhist tradition of his day as "degenerate," and he "called on Korean Buddhism to evolve along what he termed modern, scientific lines, while still drawing from its wellspring in Asian spiritual culture" (Buswell 1992: 26). On the Vietnamese reforms see esp. the remarks by Heinz Bechert and Vu Duy-Tu (1976: 190-193). The Vietnamese Buddhist teacher best known in the West, Thich Nhat Hanh, similarly propounds a somewhat "Protestantized" Buddhism. Thich Nhat Hanh had been a scholar of religion at Van Hanh Buddhist University in Saigon, and was active in the peace movement in Vietnam until barred from re-entry to his country in 1966 after a lecture tour to the West. He was also among the founders of the socially active Tiep Hien Order begun in Vietnam in 1964. Note the first of the Order's fourteen precepts: "Do not be idolatrous about or bound to any doctrine, theory or ideology, including Buddhist ones. Buddhist systems of thought must be guiding means and not absolute truth" (*Vajradhatu Sun* Dec. 1985-Jan. 1986: 2). The seventh precept, which enjoins concentration on breathing as well as mindfulness meditation, is considered the "core" of the Tiep Hien precepts.

<sup>52</sup> *Digha-nikāya* 22, and *Majjhima-nikāya* 10.

<sup>53</sup> See, for example, Goleman 1977; Kohn 1987: 65-73, and 1989: 193-195; Ornstein 1972; Shapiro 1984: 6; Walsh 1984 and 1993.

<sup>54</sup> See the discussions in Bronkhorst 1986; Bucknell 1991; Cousins 1973; Griffiths 1983b; and Stuart-Fox 1989. In addition to scriptural discrepancies over the meaning of the term *jhāna*, there is evidence that contemporary use of the term *vipassanā* diverges significantly from canonical norms. While "access concentration" was traditionally seen as prerequisite for the development of *vipassanā* (Cousins 1973: 123), there was clearly an analytic component to *vipassanā* practice as well: it involved controlled reflection upon (or recollection of) central Buddhist tenets such as impermanence or non-self. This more "discursive" element is lacking in some contemporary techniques that go under the rubric of *vipassanā*, rendering them closer to what would have traditionally been classified as *samatha*. This point has been made by some Asian critics of the *vipassanā* movement (see below).

<sup>55</sup> In a recent article on *jhāna*, Roderick Bucknell claims that ethnographic evidence points to just such a consensus, and that this consensus constitutes empirical evidence for Buddhaghosa's account: "It can be fairly readily confirmed that Buddhaghosa's account is generally accurate as a description of the meditative practice. Numerous practicing meditators, particularly in the Buddhist countries of Southeast Asia, routinely experience many of the stages Buddhaghosa describes" (Bucknell 1993: 338). Bucknell immediately goes on to admit, however, that "such meditators and their teachers do not necessarily use Buddhaghosa's terminology; however, some of the stages they describe can be readily recognized and correlated with his account" (ibid.) The main piece of evidence adduced in support of this striking claim is a series of conversations with a meditation master from Bangkok, Chaokhun Rajasiddhimuni (ibid.: n. 28). Bucknell is sufficiently confident of the empirical foundations of Theravāda meditation exercises to suggest that "Researchers wishing to investigate the matter at first hand can do so by taking up intensive meditation themselves. Such experimentation will support the claim that all meditators pass through essentially the same sequence of stages, provided they pursue the practice intensively and persistently enough, in a suitable environment, and with competent guidance" (ibid.: 388-389). As we

will see below, there is in fact little agreement among teachers in Southeast Asia as to the identification and designation of specific meditative states. Indeed, the question as to who is able to offer “competent guidance” is a contentious subject among seasoned meditators.

<sup>56</sup> The pamphlet is reproduced in part in King 1980: 126-132.

<sup>57</sup> See esp. the documents collected in Buddha Sāsana Nuggaha Organization 1979, as well as the discussions in Bond 1988: 162-171; Carrithers 1983: 240-243; and Gombrich and Obeyesekere 1988: 454.

<sup>58</sup> Kheminda believed the technique heterodox as it did not follow the traditional three-stage path, consisting of perfection of morality, concentration, and wisdom (*sīla*, *samādhi*, and *paññā*). Kheminda’s views were first published in the pages of *World Buddhism*, and are reproduced in part in Buddha Sāsana Nuggaha Organization 1979, along with rejoinders by prominent disciples of Mahāsi Sayādaw. See also Kheminda 1980, and the discussion in Bond 1988: 164-171.

<sup>59</sup> Buddha Sāsana Nuggaha Organization 1979: 35. Note also the following: “The Ven. Mahāsi Sayādaw, on the strength not only of Ceylon commentaries, etc. but also of the practical experiences of the yogis, has, with the best of intentions, written the above-mentioned treatise on Buddhist meditation” (ibid.: 29-30).

<sup>60</sup> Kassapa 1957: 12, cited in Bond 1988: 170.

<sup>61</sup> Gombrich and Obeyesekere 1988: 454. Objections to the Mahāsi method do not emerge from traditionalist quarters alone. I was informed by two teachers associated with U Ba Khin’s center in Rangoon that experiences certified as *sotāpatti* by Mahāsi and his disciples are not the real thing. This is noteworthy, as many of U Ba Khin’s own disciples are believed to have attained the stage of *sotāpatti*, and thus their objections do not stem from the traditional belief that the attainment of *sotāpatti* is rare. Note also the personal account by Eric Lerner, an American who trained at U Ba Khin’s center under his successor Sayama. Lerner recounts how, after a period of training in Burma, he retreated to a forest monastery in Sri Lanka where he experienced what he took to be *sotāpatti*. Upon returning to Burma he was told, much to his chagrin, that it was only a “taste” of *jhāna* and that it was more of a hindrance than a help (Lerner 1977).

<sup>62</sup> See also King 1980: 143-144, where he discusses the problems in characterizing Sunlun’s technique as either *vipassanā* or *samatha*. Buswell has similar problems in situating Sōn *hwadu* practice within the “classical” Buddhist schema of *vipassanā-samatha*: “*hwadu* is not intended to generate a state of *samādhi* but a state in which *both* the calmness of *samādhi* and the perspicuity of *prajñā* are maintained.... If one were to try to place the state of mind engendered through *kanhwa* practice in the stages in Buddhist meditation outlined in the Theravāda school, I believe it would be rather more akin to ‘access concentration’ (*upacāra-samādhi*), which accompanies ten specific types of discursive contemplations” (Buswell 1992: 159).

<sup>63</sup> In U Ba Khin’s analysis of Mr. A’s *phala* experience, for example, U Ba Khin includes a detailed description of the sequence of Mr. A.’s training, despite the fact that the course of training lasted a mere three days (King 1980: 130-132). The argument is explicit: if the training that led to the experience conformed to canonical descriptions of the path to *nibbāna*, then the resultant experience must indeed have been *nibbāna*. Another contemporary authority, Saddhātissa, warns that even if a meditator finds his sessions improving dramatically, such that “he is attaining trance-like states of concentration,” if there is “no change in his daily

life ... it may well be that what he has been calling tranquillity and concentration is, in fact, a state of self-induced hypnotism" (cited in Cousins 1973: 126).

<sup>64</sup> There are, in fact, early precedents for the "Watts heresy." According to the T'ang dynasty exegete Tsung-mi (780-841), the Ch'an master Wu-chu (714-774) of the Pao-t'ang school in Szechwan took the iconoclastic and antinomian rhetoric of Ch'an literally, such that he refused to transmit the precepts and rejected most of the liturgical and ritual procedures considered integral to the monastic tradition. No doubt this contributed to the quick demise of his lineage. See the account in Broughton 1983: 38-40.

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# THE CATEGORY "RELIGION" IN RECENT PUBLICATIONS: A CRITICAL SURVEY

RUSSELL T. MCCUTCHEON

## *Review article*

"[T]he current debate about the concept of religion is not as innocent as it may seem..." (Jacques Waardenburg: in Despland/Vallée 1992: 226).

- TALAL ASAD, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam*. Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1993. ISBN 0-801-84632-3
- UGO BIANCHI (ed.), *The Notion of "Religion" in Comparative Research: Selected Proceedings of the XVI IAHR Congress*. Rome: "L'Erma" di Bretschneider, 1994. ISBN 8-870-62852-3
- PETER BYRNE, *Natural Religion and the Nature of Religion: The Legacy of Deism*. London: Routledge, 1989. ISBN 0-415-04104-X
- PETER B. CLARKE/PETER BYRNE, *Religion Defined and Explained*. London: St. Martin's Press 1993. ISBN 0-312-09472-8
- MICHEL DESPLAND/GÉRARD VALLÉE (eds.), *Religion in History: The Word, the Idea, the Reality*. Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 1992. ISBN 0-88920-211-7
- PETER HARRISON, *'Religion' and the Religions in the English Enlightenment*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990. ISBN 0-521-38530-X
- THOMAS IDINOPULOS/EDWARD YONAN (eds.), *Religion and Reductionism: Essays on Eliade, Segal, and the Challenge of the Social Sciences for the Study of Religion*. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1993. ISBN 9-004-09870-4
- HARJOT OBEROI, *The Construction of Religious Boundaries: Culture, Identity, and Diversity in the Sikh Tradition*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994. ISBN 0-226-61592-8
- BENSON SALER, *Conceptualizing Religion: Immanent Anthropologists, Transcendent Natives, and Unbounded Categories*. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1993. ISBN 9-004-09585-3
- BRYAN S. TURNER, *Orientalism, Postmodernism, and Globalism*. London: Routledge, 1994. ISBN 0-415-10861-6

What counts as religion and, more importantly, who gets to decide? How useful is this category, given its clearly European and largely Christian-influenced heritage? What is the role of the scholar of religion in attempting to determine a normative definition? And what is at stake in the long-standing debate over whether religion is socio-politically autonomous—in a word, *sui generis*—or simply a scholarly, taxonomic category used for but one aspect of the continuum of human, historical practices? Recently a number of scholars have, if not explicitly, then implicitly, addressed these questions. This critical survey examines some recent contributions to the analysis of the category of "religion" in light of their place in the continuing debate over the usefulness of the category "sui generis religion," and the place of naturalistic theories in the study of religion. Accordingly, these publications ought to be seen as part of a continuing and larger discourse on the importance of just who gets to define, construct, and theorize about "religion."

*1. The lay of the theoretical land: Essences versus taxonomies*

Until recently, Wilfred Cantwell Smith's thirty year old work, *The Meaning and End of Religion*,<sup>1</sup> constituted one of the more notable critiques of the concept "religion" as it is used by scholars. Cantwell Smith's thesis is by now a familiar one: to examine what he understood to be the externals of religion (what he termed the cumulative tradition) as the sum total of religious experience reifies subjective human experiences by overlooking the more important internal element of personal faith in transcendence. In a nutshell, he advised against taking a part for the whole. Because this process of reification is so deeply entrenched in the modern science of religion, Cantwell Smith recommended that scholars no longer employ "religion" whatsoever. Instead, he maintained that research ought more accurately to reflect this double nature of religious organizations and experiences—namely, their external and observable aspects (tradition, myths, ritual, etc.) and their internal and personal aspects (faith).

Although Cantwell Smith's work is by no means representative of the major trend in recent history of religions (especially in light of his methodological rule concerning the authority and priority of the emic perspective over against other forms of hermeneutical inquiry), it is important to note that Cantwell Smith, like Eliade and many others, prioritized what they understand to be interior and generally inaccessible personal experiences and religious convictions at the expense of observable, documentable data. (That such hermeneutical scholarship usually yields

results with which few—if any—devotees would actually agree is another problem of course). In other words, as in the case of Eliade's works, from the outset Cantwell Smith excluded the possibility that a non-religious explanation could better account for the data as reported by devotees and adherents. For Cantwell Smith, like Otto before him and for all "sensitive men," religion is essentially an *a priori* mystery, "an open element, unknown and undominated."<sup>2</sup>

Given Cantwell Smith's *a priori* emphasis on the interiority and mystery of religion, his critique of the category "religion" is most easily read as a critique of what is termed the naturalistic or reductionistic approach to studying this aspect of human experience and behavior. Although his recommendation against using "religion" in such a totalized and reified fashion has had some influence (note how often we now talk about "religious traditions"), not all contemporary critiques of "religion" as a scholarly category are necessarily concerned with defending the *sui generis* or private and interiorized nature of religious acts and systems. However, even though we now seem to be in the midst of a minor renaissance of works that critically examine the history, implications, and continued usefulness of the theoretical category "religion," there is a strange mixture of theoretical perspectives in this debate on "religion." Some members of this new generation of scholars have critical concerns that are significantly different from those of Cantwell Smith. For example, applying some insights from postmodern and post-colonial theorizing, Tim Murphy argues that such universalized categories as "religion"—defined as essence or manifestation—are part of the baggage of Occidental Humanism.<sup>3</sup> And Jeppe Sinding Jensen has noted that some have gone so far as to suggest using the alternative term, "ethno-hermeneutics" to avoid the theological connotations of "religion."<sup>4</sup>

However, in spite of these interesting contributions to this long-standing debate, some scholars are continuing Cantwell Smith's critique of how this theoretical construct cannot adequately represent what they maintain to be the essential element shared by the great diversity of private experiences and public manifestations. Perhaps there is no better example than John Cumpsty's position that "religion" cannot represent a person's sense of belonging to what he has somewhat problematically referred to simply as "the ultimately real."<sup>5</sup>

To one degree or another, most scholars would generally agree with Eric Sharpe when he wrote that "religion" "is an intellectual construction, a device through which the rationalist passion for classifying and pigeonholing expresses itself."<sup>6</sup> But, given the somewhat pejorative connotations of his choice of terms (e.g., "passion" and "pigeonholing"),

one is justified in inquiring whether or not researchers are warranted in maintaining that the methods and theories of the academic study of religion can somehow surpass or transcend the admittedly inherent human passion for generalizing, comparing, and even "pigeonholing." Although postmodernism seems to have provided a variety of discourses (among them the theological discourse) with a new basis for claiming authority within the university, acknowledging that "there is no outside the text" means not simply a relativity of acceptable discourses but, more importantly, the intrinsically and inescapably taxonomic, practical, and even tactical nature of all human language, knowledge, and "passions." In other words, knowledge of, and access to, historically and linguistically entrenched humans making claims and performing actions is all we've got—regardless of the fact that some of them routinely claim to transcend (or have information that transcends) their contexts.

Roughly speaking, then, the critical camps in this debate on the status or use of "religion" seem to be divided between, on the one hand, those who maintain that "religion" is, for good or bad, a taxonomic tool that labels, divides, abstracts, and describes portions of human behavior and belief in relation to other equally constructed aspects of behavior and belief (one thinks of Jonathan Z. Smith as one of the primary representatives of this position<sup>7</sup>) and, on the other, those essentialist scholars who, along with Cantwell Smith, maintain that the focus of research on religion somehow ought to transcend (or, in the least, not be confused with) human, historical categories of thought and communication. For the former group, then, the "religion" employed by the latter scholars is far too wide to qualify as scientifically and comparatively useful, whereas for the latter, the former's conceptual tool is far too narrow and fails to "take religion seriously."

## 2. Religion from the Enlightenment to the postmodernism

Two related additions to the critical literature on "religion" are Peter Byrne's *Natural Religion and the Nature of Religion: The Legacy of Deism* (1989) and Peter Harrison's *'Religion' and the Religions in the English Enlightenment* (1990). Whereas the former argues that the category of "natural religion," having made its way through the Romantic era, provided the theoretical basis for the modern study of religion as an essentially human, rather than revelatory, phenomenon and object of study, the latter argues in somewhat of a sociology of knowledge fashion that the "chief ideological sources for the seventeenth-century construction of 'religion' were ... the Reformation, the Renaissance, and the Classical Age" (Har-

rison 1990: 7). The benefit of both these works is that they take seriously the task of theoretical analysis, examining the history, origins, and possible implications of a scholarly category rather than assessing its “fit” with the lived experience of religious people. Of interest should also be Benson Saler’s *Conceptualizing Religion: Immanent Anthropologists, Transcendent Natives, and Unbounded Categories* (1993) which, unlike Cantwell Smith’s essentialist focus, proposes a multi-factoral approach for defining religion that Saler believes will be of greater use to anthropological observers. By breaking down the “hard-and-fast boundary between ‘religion’ and ‘non-religion’”, such a multi-factoral approach is “ineluctably comparativist, for ... it renders religion an affair of more or less rather than, as in the digitized constructs employed by essentialists, a categorical matter of ‘yes’ or ‘no’ ” (Saler 1994: 25). Of note is that both Harrison and Saler explicitly situate their work in light of Cantwell Smith’s—demonstrating the enduring, if problematic, nature of *The Meaning and End of Religion*.

Harjot Oberoi, in *The Construction of Religious Boundaries: Culture, Identity, and Diversity in the Sikh Tradition*, makes a strong case for just such an anti-essentialist study of human identity through the construction and maintenance of religious boundaries. In his interesting and provocative book he presumes from the outset that religion in general is “a social and cultural process; not something given, but an activity embedded in everyday life, a part of human agency” (23). I have termed Oberoi’s book provocative not only because such an explicitly stated theoretical approach would be problematic to many scholars, but because in the study of some particular religions, Sikhism being one, such a theoretical approach is even more problematic to devotees. Clearly this is not the place to enter such a debate, but suffice it to say that Oberoi’s work should be of great interest to scholars who are not willing simply to reproduce emic accounts—regardless of the socio-political investments some or all insiders may have in such accounts. Regarding the controversial emic/etic distinction, Oberoi comes down squarely in support of developing etic, theoretical generalizations. “Historians,” he writes, “are at fault when they simply reproduce these [emic] value judgments and employ categories invented by a section of the Sikh elites to discredit specific beliefs and rituals” of other members of the Sikh community (32). In stressing the development of non-religious accounts of the construction of religious identity, Oberoi’s method entertains that insider accounts are not self-contained and autonomous, simply in need of scholarly systematization and interpretation, but that they may be powerful social, political, even ideological tools. This latest contribution to historical, critical scholarship on Sikhism should be welcomed by scholars.

Related to Saler's and Oberoi's anti-essentialist thesis is Talal Asad's collection of eight essays whose Foucaultian influence is evident in its very title: *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (1993). From the outset, Asad demonstrates that the presumed *sui generis* status of "religion" and the popular "theoretical search for an essence of religion invites us to separate it conceptually from the domain of power" (Asad 1993: 29). Having successfully segmented issues of power, domination, and opposition from the realm of "religion" through the use of the *sui generis* strategy, scholars and insiders as well proceed to create a "distinctive space of human practice and belief which cannot be reduced to any other" (27). One can think here of the current protective effect played by appeals to the essentially religious, cultural, or ethnic nature of an issue or debate. For good or ill, claims to socio-political autonomy bring with them powerful means for protecting and isolating all sorts of other claims and programs.

However, for those reductionists in our field who might at first welcome such a strong critique of the political implications of the non-reductionist program, Asad's postmodernist stance is equally critical of the imperializing that commonly passes for social scientific research. In this regard, especially relevant is his first essay, "Religion as an Anthropological Category" (27-54), in which Asad, in a manner related to Murphy's critical focus already noted above, critiques what he considers to be the problems of Clifford Geertz's widely influential but nonetheless universalist definition of religion. If a search for the essence of religion is theoretically and politically problematic, so the reasoning goes, then universalist definitions must be as well. According to Asad by offering a universal definition in the first place, Geertz's culturally sensitive category "religion" yet excludes how the authoritative status of religious myths, rituals, institutions, texts, etc., are "products of historically distinct disciplines [in the Foucaultian sense of the disciplinarian associations, discourse, presuppositions, etc.] and force" (54).

In place of such universal definitions, Asad recommends that students of *particular* religions should unpack such "comprehensive concepts" as "religion" and "culture" into their heterogeneous and historically specific elements, each of which reflects a variety of power relations in local situations. Although this respect for local details is most important, one cannot help but think that Asad's recommendation lands the researcher in a bit of a problem. For, as important as it is to avoid universal generalizations about religion that ignore local details, it is equally problematic to generalize about "particular religions." For example, when we say "Buddhism" do we mean Hinayana or Mahayana? And

when we say “Mahayana,” which variety do we mean? And do we distinguish varieties of local details through appealing to yet other abstract generalizations such as nations (e.g., Vietnamese Buddhism) or more complex national/ethnic categories (e.g., Afro-American religion)? Simply put, what counts as local? And related to this, Asad’s recommendation all but rules out the generation of widely applicable, cross-cultural theories about certain sorts of human actions—in this case, actions and beliefs involving gods or transcendent states. So it would appear that depending upon one’s prior interests (e.g., to explain why people populate the heavens with gods in the first place, to account for the great diversity of gods, or to counteract hegemony in the form of missionizing), what counts as local will vary dramatically. Hence, Asad’s well-intentioned advice turns out to be not so easy to follow.

### 3. *Reductionism and orientalism*

For those concerned with the current state of the reductionism debate, it will be well worth their while to examine Thomas Idinopulos and Edward Yonan’s edited volume, *Religion and Reductionism: Essays on Eliade, Segal, and the Challenge of the Social Sciences for the Study of Religion* (1993). Most of the major contributors to the debate as it has taken shape over the past decade in various scholarly journals (Robert Segal and Daniel Pals come immediately to mind) are well represented in the volume. A number of the essays were originally presented at a conference held in the U.S. in 1990 but the volume has been supplemented with a number of invited and/or reprinted contributions—amounting to sixteen essays in total. A number of the essays explore just what “reductionism” means (see especially Arvind Sharma’s and Ivan Strenski’s useful individual surveys of types of reductionism and the detailed essay by Thomas Ryba on reductionism in the natural sciences), some revisit Segal’s and Eliade’s contributions to the debate, while others investigate specific issues (for example, William Paden’s study of “the sacred” in Durkheim’s work clearly distinguishes one use of the term from what must be considered the dominant Eliadean usage).

George Weckman’s contribution, “Reductionism in the Classroom” (211-219) places this debate in a new context, investigating how the non-reductionist agenda makes more sense when understood as not only a strategy for gaining much needed intellectual turf in the 1950s and 1960s, but more importantly as a pedagogical tool in the undergraduate classroom. With the former in mind, this might, in part, explain the popularity of Eliade and his methodology which arrived on the North

American scene just when issues of institutional autonomy and methodological demarcation were arising. With his own nationalist past, Eliade's efforts to distinguish essential differences may have easily been applied to the problem of religious identity.<sup>8</sup> And, regarding the latter, the voices of religious people ought not to go unheard and which of us will forget that our students are themselves religious people—necessitating a careful teaching technique at times. But the over-zealous application of non-reductionist positions—something Weckman acknowledges—leading to the virtual *a priori* exclusion of reductive studies, often leads simply to reporting details and sometimes even to the celebration of the diversity of emic perspectives. As a corrective to what some consider to be the image of reductionists as being the "cultured despisers of religion," it must be recalled, as Robert Segal has repeatedly pointed out, that far from silencing religious accounts, proper social scientific method requires scholars to listen *intently* to insider reports for such reports are the basis for all social scientific work. It is just that the social scientist's theoretically informed questions do not provide these emic accounts with final explanatory authority.<sup>9</sup> Accordingly, social scientific theorizing is not competing with insider accounts but, rather, offering explanations from specific non-religious, rational, theoretical frameworks. If the devotee wishes to ignore all such theorizing because it has somehow missed what they consider to be the essential, private element of faith, that is most certainly their prerogative. But such a rejection should have no bearing on the continued effort to generate etic theories.

What is particularly interesting about *Religion and Reductionism* is that the contributors represent virtually every conceivable position in this debate, making the volume an advanced (but expensive) state of the art review. There are essays by those most associated with the pro-reductionist side as well as essays that maintain the traditional, and admittedly rather weak, argument, as does Wayne Elzey's, that reductionistic theories "missed the irreducibly religious, that is, the maturely and authentically human essence of religion as it existed in non-Western cultures" (85).

Related to the reductionist critique of normative and ahistorical scholarship is Bryan Turner's *Orientalism, Postmodernism, and Globalism* (1994). Turner is the author of *Marx and the End of Orientalism*<sup>10</sup>—which was published the same year (1978) as Edward Said's more influential study of orientalism. The connection between work on orientalism, postmodernism, and the category "religion" should be clear from the above discussion of Asad: one of the primary strategies identified by Said and others in the process of orientalizing is that of minimalization or de-

historicizing the other—in this specific case the Muslim other. Therefore, following Asad, when applied to the study of religion, essentialized constructs (be they the monolithic “Orient” or “the sacred”) can function to minimize historical human agents and camouflage socio-political agendas. For the purposes of this current survey, then, it is Turner’s fourth essay in his latest collection, “Conscience in the Construction of Religion” (53-66), that is of particular interest. There, Turner provides a useful critique of the late University of Chicago Islamicist Marshall G.S. Hodgson’s attempts to redress what he took to be the shortcomings of traditional work on Islam, published as *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization* (1974).<sup>11</sup> Although Turner acknowledges the value of Hodgson’s attempts to give “full consideration to the variety of ways in which Islam was determined or influenced by sociological, economic, and geographical factors,” he contends that due to presuppositions that grounded his research, in the end, “Hodgson’s approach still fails to extricate itself fully from the asociological pitfalls of traditional orientalism” (53-54). In a vein explicitly indebted to Cantwell Smith, Hodgson emphasized the primary causal role played by private and individual “conscience” which in turn, he maintained, led to various external, cultural or social manifestations.

Much as in the case of those who employ *sui generis* religion, Hodgson, according to Turner, employed “conscience” as a “creative, irreducible activity in [the] history of private individuals” (54). And, just as for a number of scholars of religion who currently advocate the social autonomy of religious experiences rather than public, political acts, Hodgson allowed historical categories into his analysis only inasmuch as social, political, and economic factors provided simple environmental conditioning for a non-contextual faith—merely, in Hodgson’s own words, setting the “limits of what is possible.” (This reminds one of Eliade’s assertions that even though all religious manifestations were by definition historical, the task of scholarship was to determine the abstract, atemporal essence which informed each historical manifestation or hierophany.) Turner rightly identifies the suspect nature of this sort of scholarship which employs religion, for whatever reason, as a means for constructing a private, privileged zone exempt from critical scrutiny.

Similar to Oberoi, then, Turner strongly supports taxonomic uses of the construct “religion” over the interiorized, politically autonomous notions of *sui generis* religion which continues to define our field.<sup>12</sup> In critiquing the personalistic approach of Hodgson, he explicitly supports the development of causal explanations in the study of religion and culture. In Turner’s words, “all social beliefs, indeed all beliefs as such, are deter-

mined. There is no residual category of beliefs which are not causally determined" (65). Simply put, scholarship is not finished once we employ such categories as "conscience," "faith" or "meaning"; in fact, it has only just begun for social scientific research can then offer explanatory accounts of these very categories themselves.

*4. Knowledge, power, and normativity*

As should be apparent from Turner's critique, categorical autonomy can sanction or construct socio-political privilege for either the insider or the interpretive scholar. With this in mind, it is worthwhile mentioning some aspects of *Religion in History* (Despland/Vallée 1992), a collection of eighteen essays from a Canadian conference on the history of the category "religion" which took place in 1989.<sup>13</sup> Specifically, this conference brought together three scholars who have all published important studies on this topic, Cantwell Smith, Michel Despland,<sup>14</sup> and Ernst Feil,<sup>15</sup> and presented them with the opportunity to reconsider and enlarge upon their original positions and to interact with a small group of invited participants. And at the close of the book, readers will find a particularly useful chronological bibliography of Cantwell Smith's published works (spanning over fifty years!) and a selective but no less useful bibliography of articles and dissertations on Cantwell Smith's research.

Apart from the retrospective essays that were written by one of the three above-named main contributors, there are essays on such varied topics as the seventeenth-century's tendencies toward intellectual reification (J. Samuel Preus), Troeltsch's and van der Leeuw's use of "religion" (Jean Richard and Richard Plantinga, respectively), the roots of a "theoretically reflective study of religion" in Asia (Michael Pye), an interesting survey article on the development of the category "world religion" in assorted textbooks and introductory surveys of religions (Katherine Young),<sup>16</sup> and Jacques Waardenburg's defense of an "open" concept of religion.<sup>17</sup> Waardenburg's thoughts on the ideological uses of scholarly research, quoted at the outset of this survey, bear repeating in detail because they shed some light on the deeper reasons for the continued interest in who gets to decide what counts as "religion" and the potential dangers of our categories. According to Waardenburg:

If knowledge leads to power, at least certain kinds of power, knowledge of religion and religions brings this power in its own way, if not to the scholars, then to those who use their knowledge either for better or worse. Consequently, the current debate about the concept of religion is not as innocent as it may seem; knowledge and insight about religions and religion may serve

the human quest for truth, but they also veil truth when used ideologically (Despland/Vallée 1992: 226).

As suggested above, the debate on “religion” may have more to do with theoretical and political issues relevant to scholars of religion and their institutional settings—and possibly to devotees as well—than it does with attempting to obtain an accurate one-to-one correspondence between the concept and reality.

But, as useful as Waardenburg’s comments are in shedding some light on the renewed interest in this debate on category formation, his reliance on a somewhat problematic positivistic stance undermines his own comments on ideology. As he phrases it a little lower on the same page, “the reason why I stress so much the risk of ideological manipulation of religious matters is precisely that ideologies destroy the very ability to observe and interpret correctly what people ‘outside’ the ‘ideological circle’ mean when they express themselves.” Simply put, Waardenburg yet presumes that the *right* conception of religion (used in identifying what really are “religious matters”) can be employed to identify when ideological manipulation is taking place. But surely any critic of Marxist notions of false-consciousness, a term not explicitly used by Waardenburg but surely implied at this point, would be quick to point out that “correct” interpretations are correct only insofar as they satisfy rules internal to the hermeneutical circle itself, a closed and isolated system that may, for all the hermeneut knows, be deeply embedded in oppressive ideological delusions. Therefore, Waardenburg’s appeal to correct interpretations may be as groundless as the very ideological manipulations that he warns his readers about.

Of related interest is Gérard Vallée’s introduction to this collection of essays which concludes with the following assertion:

Any academic step that might contribute to lifting the thick veil over the reality of religion and to giving back to religion its *droit de cité* will have to be considered a positive step amidst the uses and abuses of religion in our world (Despland/Vallée 1992: 6).

In spite of his comments about the practical uses for knowledge, Waardenburg ultimately seems to agree with Vallée’s normative statement: just as for Cantwell Smith, there is a *proper* reality to religion that needs to be restored and recovered. Presumably, it falls to the scholar of religion first to discover and subsequently to reinstate this category—possibly in a fashion similar to Eliade’s new humanism. Sadly, and indeed this is ultimately the undoing of such normative approaches, just how one is to access this mystery behind the veil—and then confirm that indeed you have hold of the right mystery—is never made clear.

5. *The notion of "religion" within the IAHR*

Into this wide-ranging debate on the theoretical and possibly even the political usefulness of "religion" comes a timely collection of essays, *The Notion of "Religion" in Comparative Research* (1994). Edited by Ugo Bianchi, it is a rather large (over 920 pages!) and very expensive (approximately U.S.\$375.00) volume containing fifteen invited and ninety selected papers from the most recent quinquennial meeting of the International Association for the History of Religions, held in Rome during the first week of September, 1990 (the volume is timely because the next meeting is in Mexico City, 5-11 August 1995). The theme of this gathering drew specific attention to "the varying national and factual implications of the use of the term 'religion' " (ix). The volume is international in character, representing only a portion of the research presented at the IAHR meeting by scholars from thirty-four different countries—though over seventy percent of the participants represented Italy, Germany (what was then West and East), America, Canada, Japan, Sweden, the Netherlands, and Denmark.<sup>18</sup>

In keeping with the international nature of the IAHR, the papers are in English, German, Italian, and French—though half are in English. Also contained in it are general descriptions of the conference itself, assorted IAHR committee memberships, Michael Pye's (IAHR Secretary-General) report highlighting the increased international representation of IAHR-affiliated organizations, Ugo Bianchi's opening "Perspectives du Congrès," the complete schedule for the congress, and a very useful (though somewhat dated) list of all the participants, including their institutional mailing addresses. The ninety selected papers are grouped in assorted categories based on religious traditions (e.g., Judaism, Buddhism, Islam, Christianity), geographic areas (Oceania, Africa, America and Mesoamerica, East Asia and India, Iran and Egypt), and methodological or theoretical themes (Anthropology, Methodology of Comparative Research, and Phenomenology). Understandably perhaps, there are a number of papers on such topics as, whether yoga, zen, or the New Age are religions, whether there is such a thing as implicit and even anonymous religion, and the use of "religion" in assorted contexts where there is no equivalent indigenous term.

The difficulty in writing an assessment of such a diverse collection of essays should be obvious, especially in the case of the massive IAHR volume. Clearly, any academic library that prides itself with housing current research in the field will want to obtain this book and the others mentioned above. Sadly, the cost of this one volume will more than likely exclude not only most individuals from purchasing a copy but most

libraries as well. (One can only speculate whether the research presented at such large congresses should be made available in a smaller, thematic series of inexpensive books in much the same way as a selection of pertinent articles from the *Encyclopedia of Religion* were also published in affordable thematic volumes.) From the outset, then, let the reader beware that this review makes no claim to be in any way an exhaustive account of this interesting book. Precisely because the postmodernists inform us that we all see through lenses of varying shades and thicknesses, the lens through which I have chosen to assess this book is as follows. Because of the popularity of, or, better put, preoccupation with, reflecting on the pitfalls of the past and the promises of the future of the study of religion (recall the number of essays published in the past twenty-five years bearing the title "Retrospect"),<sup>19</sup> the concluding session of the IAHR conference, "The History of Religions: Retrospect and Prospect" constitutes a concise picture of the field and a useful place to "assess the assessments" of five very different scholars positioned at the opening of the 1990s, writing at a time of great socio-political changes all across the globe.

Sung-Hae Kim (Seoul), Ninian Smart (Santa Barbara), Donald Wiebe (Toronto), Giulia Sfameni Gasparro (Messina), and Ugo Bianchi (Rome), all addressed the IAHR congress on its closing day on what they considered to be the issues most pressing for the history of religions as it entered the late-twentieth-century. From within this admittedly small group of scholars there arise many of the central issues that have preoccupied—and will no doubt continue to preoccupy—scholars' theoretical and political attention.

#### 6. *Authentic faith, respect, and true understandings*

Uppermost for Kim ("The History of Religion: Retrospect and Prospect" in Bianchi, 1994: 897-899), as for Smart as well, is the issue of inadequate international representation at such congresses. As the only non-European or non-North American member of this panel, Kim's very presence is an indication of the need for what Pye called "regional diversification." That the long-standing European dominance in the field is viewed as a problem which needs to be addressed is clear from much of Pye's opening report and the very location of the 1995 Mexico City congress is itself evidence that change is taking place. Kim goes so far as to suggest that an indication of the field's coming-of-age will be when it "outgrow[s] its initial stage as a western learning" (897). Although few scholars of religion would deny the need for organizations such as the IAHR (since it *is* international) to represent the widely differing scholarly

needs, research interests, institutional structures, and indigenous languages of all its members, for some scholars, however, to outgrow the field's "western history" threatens to alter the very foundation of the field. For example, for Kim, the history of religions has a role to play, in cooperation with other fields in the humanities, "to testify to the authenticity of faith statements in the actual history of religious communities" (897).

Although a precise interpretation of this statement is not possible, it certainly appears to recommend that the academic study of religion has a role to play in making normative judgments concerning just what constitutes true religion and "authentic faith." After identifying what many would no doubt agree to be the inherent limitations of such scholarly polarities as sacred-profane when applied in cross-cultural and comparative work, Kim goes on to recommend that scholars "should have freedom and sensitivity to choose categories and methods that fit and enhance the true understanding of a religious tradition" (898). Calls to avoid methodological and theoretical orthodoxy are one issue Kim undoubtedly shares with most scholars who favor cross-disciplinarity, but the concern with *enhancing* the *true* understanding of religions is entirely another issue and recalls an era when scholars of religion were preoccupied with constructing disciplinary boundaries and engaged in what amounts to tactical skirmishes over academic and institutional turf. And, reminiscent of Eliade's creative hermeneutics, not only is the "religious value" at times intimately involved with "safeguarding the integrity of humanity itself," but the study of religion as well, according to Kim, "has paramount importance not only in the understanding of what human is, but in subsisting the preservation of humanity itself" (898).

Amidst Kim's call for scholars to *respect* differences between religious traditions, the references to religion's "unique character," "function of its own," its "ultimate reference," and the need for scholars of religion to "safeguard the integrity of humanity," one detects not simply a clash between "West" and "East," as some would describe it, but a clash between scientifically and empirically testable claims and those which are themselves part and parcel of the datum scholars of religion purport to be studying, interpreting, understanding, and, ultimately, explaining. In other words, the clash Kim outlines is not between cultures but between two divergent views of the field and two significantly different theoretical perspectives. On the one hand, there is a well-established scholarly tradition that sees the field as an effort to understand essences, and on the other, the goal of studying religion is to develop theories that can account for not just why people do certain things in this or that manner (e.g., com-

parative work on the details of prayer or meditation), but in fact why they do it in the first place.

To characterize this difference as one of culture is indeed confusing and misleading for the separation of non-religious interpretations from religious interpretations is evident in any number of cultural, historical, and academic contexts. One need only think of John Hick's extremely well-attended address to the History of the Study of Religion session at the 1994 American Academy of Religion meeting to find that the willingness for scholars to entertain and devise religious interpretations of religion (which constitutes one instance of circular reasoning at its best) yet appears to dominate the academy. Responses from scholars practicing non-religious methods of interpretation and, more importantly, explanation (as in the case of Robert Segal who, on this occasion, responded to Hick) have little in common with such religious hermeneutics.

Further evidence of this sort of confusion comes in Peter Clarke and Peter Byrne's recent book, *Religion Defined and Explained* (1993), where, along with very useful chapters devoted to surveying philosophical, socio-economic, sociological, and psychological theories, there appears a chapter on religious *theories* (rather than, in the case of Hick's own title, *interpretations*<sup>20</sup>) of religion. The confusion mentioned above is evident in this chapter, which is largely a commentary on Hick's work, in the manner in which the term "theory" is used. Theories have much to do not only with hypotheses that can be tested but—if one follows Karl Popper's influential conception of science—ultimately, with attempts at explanation that conceivably can be falsified. But surely one of the criteria that distinguishes religious from scientific discourses is that only the latter are falsifiable. Simply put, I know of no way to disconfirm such statements as "Jesus loves me," "Muhammad is the prophet of Allah," "Mahavira was the twenty-fourth Tirthankara," and, in the case of Hick's own work, "all religions worship the same transcendently real focus" (Clarke/Byrne 1993: 79). Accordingly, insider accounts for such things as how the world came to be (cosmogonies in general, and creationism in particular, are excellent examples), claims concerning the common sacred essence to all religion (religious pluralism), or explanations as to why people are religious in the first place (e.g., because a deity bestowed something upon people, or possibly because the sages of old simply heard something) are not "theories" and labelling them as such glosses over a very important distinction. What is missed in the confusion is that religious accounts are the *data* for scholars who develop sociological, psychological, socio-economic, etc., theories of religion. Accordingly, religious accounts are not competing theoretical accounts.

Accordingly, if Kim's use of "culture" and call for the increased representation of non-European scholars of religion at such gatherings as the IAHR is linked to the call for promoting the very datum scholars ought to be engaged in studying, then scholarship of this nature is already more than adequately represented in the academy. Finally, then, Kim's prescription for the field ends in a contradiction: on the one hand there is the acknowledgment that the history of religions is by no means unique, and that other students of the humanities are needed in our studies, but on the other, there is the assertion that religious experience is itself unique. Given Kim's reliance on, and promotion of, *sui generis* religion, then, this one future of the history of religions is not all that dissimilar to its past.

7. *Eurocentrism as the bane or basis of the study of religion?*

Like Kim, Ninian Smart ("Retrospect and Prospect: The History of Religions," in Bianchi 1994: 901-903) is very much concerned with increased international representation in academic organizations; for "the days of mutually isolated cultures is [sic] over" (901). He opens his remarks by noting the progress that has occurred in the field. He recalls that at the previous IAHR congress held in Rome (1955) he counted only "seventeen scholars ... teaching all religions other than Christianity in the universities of Britain" (901). But, given Smart's past writings (his recent proposals for a World Academy of Religion<sup>21</sup> notwithstanding) and his long recognized interest in methodological and theoretical issues, it seems evident that the kind of changes advocated by Kim are not what Smart would necessarily call progress. In a suitably Popperian mode, Smart observes how, in spite of the many theoretical shortcomings of such scholars as Pettazzoni, Heiler, James, and Zaehner, they nonetheless made hypotheses that fellow scholars in the field could set about testing. Like Popper, whom he approvingly quotes to close his paper, Smart cares little for where our hypotheses about religion come from; even though Eliade was, in Smart's estimation, "in a disguised form, a preacher" (901), nevertheless he fueled the field with innumerable hypotheses all of which have been applied by countless scholars and are now being thoroughly tested and criticized. No doubt, Smart would maintain that the progress in the field is not simply to be measured in terms of a greater number of scholars teaching and researching in religions outside of Christianity. More than this, progress in any scientific pursuit is evidenced by the number of discarded theoretical perspectives. Far from burying the work of Eliade because it is outmoded or biased, for example, those who

are now engaged in critiquing and falsifying his unique blend of morphology, comparativism, phenomenology, hermeneutics, and intuitionism—a project generally termed the post-Eliadean discourse on religion—are advancing the discourse in the only way possible: through testing hypotheses regardless of their origins.

What is unclear, however, is just what Smart meant by observing that scholars of religion have made little progress “in absorbing values from East and South to compliment the terminology of our profession, which is so largely drawn from Northern, that is to say Western cultures” (902). Like Kim, Smart criticizes the fact that the categories of research in our field reflect not simply its European but also its Christian origins. As part of his discourse on “absorbing values,” Smart seems to be implying that our vocabulary—which is itself representative of our theories and methods—must become more international: “*bhakti* and *li* as well as *devotion* and *ritual*” ought to be useful scholarly tools. It is true that the field has not rushed to rid itself of scholarly categories that in fact are entrenched within a Christian context. One need only think of the number of introductory religion textbooks that yet employ “sin,” “savior,” or “God” as if they were useful, cross-cultural comparative categories. But the question to be pressed is whether such categories as “religion,” “ritual,” “myth,” “institution” etc., are themselves so entrenched in a particular (to use Smart’s own terminology) worldview or ideology as to make them inadmissible (or in need of supplementary terms) when used in cross-cultural, comparative research. For if they are, and if, as Smart recommends, transnationalizing the field means ending our efforts to generate cross-culturally useful theoretical terminologies and comparative vocabularies in favor of using a multiplicity of local, indigenous, and emic terms (e.g., “using *mārga* and *shari‘ah* as well as *religion* and *law*”), then the goal of developing widely applicable explanatory theories, rather than detailed scholarly description, is all but ruled out.<sup>22</sup>

In final analysis, then, Smart’s proposals, somewhat like Kim’s and possibly even Asad’s, appear to be rather problematic. After recommending that transnationalizing the field means employing a multiplicity of terminologies (a move which, by definition, challenges the hegemony of European theories and concepts), he calls for scholars of religion (a unifying concept which itself leaves a trace of this self-same hegemony) to “blow our own trumpet more” when dealing with public issues and the media. The problem is that without such shared comparative and taxonomic—yet imperializing—categories as “religion,” “ritual,” etc., there is no “we” to do any trumpet blowing. In other words, it must be determined how to constitute a “we” when, for all we know, we might not even be talking about the same thing.

8. *Religion in the academy: Demarcation revisited*

True to form, Donald Wiebe's contribution to this panel ("Transcending Religious Language: Towards the Recovery of an Academic Agenda," in Bianchi 1994: 905-912) is concerned with how the retro- (in not only the sense of 'the past' but, one infers, possibly in the sense of 'the present moving backwards') influences the pro-spect of the field. As readers of his widely cited earlier essay on the "failure of nerve" in the academic study of religion<sup>23</sup> will recall, Wiebe's thesis is concerned with how the hard-won nineteenth-century intellectual and institutional demarcation of the scientific study of religion from confessional theology has slowly eroded to the point where contemporary scholars routinely exclude non-religious theorizing from their studies based on an *a priori* "concern with the welfare of religion" and an undefended knowledge that religion "is essential to the continued welfare of humanity" (909). Contrary to this modern trend, the academic study of religion arose, according to Wiebe, "as a result of a conscious and deliberate transcendence of theological assumptions and religious commitments that had informed the broader more traditional study of religions" (906). According to Wiebe's position, the institutional legitimacy the field now enjoys (a tentative status in many present-day institutions and nations) is directly proportional to the distance of the field from confessional agendas, interpretations, and vocabularies.

Wiebe finds it ironic, however, that in spite of this relationship between non-religious scholarship and institutional credibility, religious categories of research and seemingly sectarian agendas are yet rampant in the field. Citing Sharpe's influential study of the history of comparative religion, Wiebe even goes so far as to suggest that, practically speaking, the field never really was de-theologized in spite of the overt efforts of associations such as the IAHR to avoid confessional studies and even philosophic methodology. Practically speaking, then, and if Wiebe is correct, in spite of what may or may not have been (for example) F. Max Müller's or C.P. Tiele's intentions, the study of religion has turned into a twentieth-century effort to develop an inclusive world theology where each religion is fairly and sympathetically represented (characteristic of some of Cantwell Smith's own work) as opposed to a scholarly and theoretical pursuit to scrutinize religion, religious people, beliefs, and institutions, as empirical data in need of explanation. The central problem, then, of much of the modern study of religion is not the problem of religion itself but the problem of religious pluralism. It is for this reason that Wiebe ends his essay with a call for increased theorizing in the field as but one

means for recovering what he understands to have been the field's original academic agenda.

No doubt Wiebe would agree with Luther Martin<sup>24</sup> in citing the current closings of some North American religion departments as evidence that the future institutional security of the field may well depend on the ability of its practitioners to convince budget-conscious administrators that the non-confessional study of religion ought to continue as part of the rational, public discourse of the academy. However, given the recent successes of research that questions the utility of such harshly interpreted emic-etic divisions (specifically, see the recent publications of Karen McCarthy Brown and Rita Gross<sup>25</sup>), such demarcation within institutions may not only be difficult to maintain but continue to be an unpopular methodological option for individual scholars.

Scholars sympathetic to the contributions of postmodern theorists, will certainly criticize Wiebe's position (along with that of Waardenburg perhaps) inasmuch as it is still based on what some characterize as an out-dated positivism. And concerning Wiebe's Popperian demarcation thesis, Ursula King virtually dismissed it by referring to it simply as Wiebe's "well-known hobby horse."<sup>26</sup> However, when viewed in the light of Kim's and even Smart's assessment of the field, or, for that matter, in light of the Catholic historian Paul Gen Aoyama's contribution to the IAHR Congress entitled, "Religion is the Work of God Shared in a Human Community" (Bianchi 1994: 847-852), Wiebe's comments on the need for practitioners in the field continually to confront what it means to study religion academically and non-confessionally rather than what it means to practice and interpret religion ecumenically are entirely relevant and well worth repeating.

### *9. Claims of autonomy and problems for the history of religions*

Unlike Smart and Wiebe, and very much related to Kim's analysis of the field, Giulia S. Gasparro's understanding of the task, and consequently the meaning, of the history of religions is very much related to the presumably autonomous and *sui generis* character of the religious datum and the history of religions ("History of Religions: A Retrospective and Prospective View," in Bianchi 1994: 913-917). The image of the field that emerges from this paper is very much in line with the dominant tradition: the history of religions is a "historico-religious discipline" that employs diverse methodologies (notably the comparative method) to determine the "specific quality of the religious phenomenon" (915). Just what this "specific quality" is, or how researchers know of it in advance

of their study is, sadly, not an issue. In spite of the fact that she discourages the use of "intuitionist hermeneutics," Gasparro offers no systematic explanation concerning just what constitutes the rightful object of the historian of religion's gaze—nor does she suggest that this ought to occupy our attention for, after all, she also advises against devoting ourselves to "abstract theories." All the reader is told is that the term "religion," in spite of its somewhat dubious Eurocentric origins, is a useful "reference parameter" or, I would presume, taxonomy, that can "characterize a certain kind of experience detectable—in various forms—in the most diverse civilizations" (917). That "religion" is itself a scholarly tool is beyond debate of course, but Gasparro appears to suggest that the real objects to which it refers, the assorted culturally diverse experiences, are in fact unified with one another, in spite of the fact that they change forms.

This, of course, constitutes one of the classic problems of the history of religions approach. In attempting to get at the "real thing" in a manner unavailable to those who employ specialized theories and methodologies (the anthropologists, the sociologists, to only name two), historians of religions fail to acknowledge or possibly fail to recognize, their own theoretical commitments. Simply put, if the specifically religious aspect of a datum (a story, some form of behavior, or a piece of art) changes forms across cultures, then how is one to recognize it without already having predetermined just what it is? In other words, how do we know we are not supposed to be studying cultural aspect X rather than Y, e.g., behaviors termed rituals rather than habits, myths rather than short stories? (Eliade, following his Jungian intuitions, of course, avoided the whole problem of generating intellectually and scientifically defensible criteria for distinguishing one from another by reducing everything—myths and movies together—to religious issues of meaning and Being.) Or, to phrase it in another way, the problem for this approach is that in attempting to gain much needed academic legitimacy and an institutional place by stating that their methods are historical (though the methods are never simply that, they are always historico-religious, socio-religious, etc.), historians of religions undermine their own hard-won methodological and institutional legitimacy by failing to acknowledge their own pre-observational theories and beliefs. Gasparro, like so many other historians of religions, is interested in studying the "facts of religion," its "specific quality," and its "complexity" eventually to determine "correct" observations and, one would imagine, proper interpretations. But at no time does she suggest the criteria by which researchers are able, first, to distinguish just what properly constitutes these specifically religious

facts and qualities from non-religious ones, and second, she fails to identify on what basis one is able to separate the better from the worse interpretations.

Like many scholars before her, and based on the *a priori* belief that there in fact is a whole picture that transcends all of the social sciences' limited perspectives, Gasparro advocates combining the findings of the other sciences (although the social sciences are held in a somewhat higher regard than in the case of some of her colleagues) to understand what can only be termed the "big picture":

with the contribution of the methods and achievements of the other sciences that legitimately investigate the phenomenon in question from their respective spheres of study (anthropology, sociology, psychology, philosophy, theology), it should be possible to give shape to a *sui generis* historical discipline capable of confronting the manifold problems posed by the object of its investigation and then solving them in compliance with all the rule of positive-inductive research. (916)

The problem is that nowhere does the history of religions defend, in a scientifically legitimate manner (note that scientific legitimacy is an issue of great importance throughout Gasparro's article), its conception of the whole picture or what it means to be a *sui generis* discipline. Without a pre-determined recipe, how does one know how much anthropology or theology ought to go into the final mix, let alone *which* anthropology or *why* theology? As a historical discipline how can historians of religions credibly talk about defining their study as *sui generis* and somehow synthesizing and thereby surpassing the other historically constrained sciences (theology notwithstanding)?

An important question lies behind such issues: Is science interested in final or ultimate explanations?<sup>27</sup> And how might one decide which explanation counts as final? As it is for Cantwell Smith, is the point of view of the devotee somehow authoritative in determining the ultimate adequacy of interpretations perhaps? Because the devotee fails to acknowledge the adequacy of, for example, the role played by guilt and aggression in a particular sacrificial act, is this a sufficient ground to begin talking about the partial and *therefore* inadequate nature of the psychological theory? Surely not; for if this were the case then many historians of religions would likewise label their own research reductive, partial, and inadequate for few devotees report that they are communing with or experiencing "the sacred" but nonetheless historians of religions continue to employ this theoretical vocabulary. Perhaps, then, talk of synthesizing methods in service of interpreting the whole picture, or religion's essence, is itself just one instance of totalizing, religious discourse and therefore

deserving the critical attention—rather than the advocacy—of scholars of religion. If one accepts even a portion of Clifford Geertz's definition of religion, then religions—among other symbol systems to be sure—are systems that effectively enable human communities to make the ideological slippage from *is* to *ought*, thereby normativizing current practices associated with one gender, class, ethnic group, nation, etc. In his own words, the religious perspective "is the conviction that the values one holds are grounded in the inherent structure of reality, that between the way one ought to live and the way things really are there is an unbreakable inner connection."<sup>28</sup> Possibly, then, the ultimate synthesis of methods and theories characteristic of the work of some of our colleagues might itself be part of the social scientist's data. We would be well advised to heed Richard Rorty's sound advice concerning such totalizing, final theories: "we must be content ... not to seek a God's-eye view."<sup>29</sup>

As should be clear, as a retrospective, Gasparro's paper succinctly embodies many of the unaddressed theoretical problems that continue to plague the history of religions. In spite of her warnings to the contrary, her paper offers no alternative to the ever-present intuitionism that constitutes the very core of this discipline. Some of these same problems also arise in Bianchi's brief closing remarks where he advocates a "holistic treatment of the object" (920).<sup>30</sup> And despite Bianchi's words concerning the need for the approach of the history of religions to be characterized by "an evaluation open to hypothesis but opposite to *a priori*, unfalsifiable selection," in the end, the discipline remains normative and unfalsifiable. Otherwise, historians of religions would have to entertain seriously the fact that there may be no whole picture, that their "holistic" methods were in fact as partial and limiting as those of their academic associates in the university's other departments, and that not only "religion" but "the sacred" and "religious experience" are all taxonomic categories some human beings use to talk not about other-worldly experiences but about other human beings.

#### 10. *The problem of method and the scope of theory*

In the end, and contrary to Bianchi's suggestions, there is only one way out of the impasse (that definitions and concepts require prior theories which themselves presume certain definitions and concepts): it is for the history of religions to discard its self-conception as the synthetic Queen of the Human Sciences and to dispel the assumptions that it is sensible to talk about studying "total man." Like all the sciences, the history of religions is inextricably entrenched in a historical and theoretical

framework and, therefore, it answers only the questions it poses, having little recourse to defending only its questions as normative. The impasse is hardly a problem to be overcome, but rather, is an accurate description of what it is to be a historically entrenched human investigator.

In the opening lines to his paper on the benefits of analytical definitions, Armin Geertz ("On Dendrolatry and Definitions: Perspectives from the Study of Oral Traditions," in Bianchi 1994: 661-665) nicely summarizes the issue: the "problem of the definition of religion is nothing less than the problem of method and the scope of theory in the study of religion" (661). Indeed, differences over "religion" clearly relate to theoretical—even institutional and political—commitments, and the methods they inspire, some of which go unnoticed and many of which pass undefended. Robert Baird's words from twenty years ago still ring true: when historians of religions "do discuss the matter [of defining religion] they show an almost complete lack of philosophic [and we might add, theoretical] sophistication regarding the meaning or significance of a definition."<sup>31</sup> The fundamental theoretical and methodological differences among the approaches to "religion" examined in this survey carries the message that debates on the adequacy of "religion," and just how one constructs it, will only be productive when scholars become self-critically aware of the theoretical assumptions and tactical agendas that they carry within their studies. For, as identified recently in this very journal by Michael Pye,<sup>32</sup> and as seen in the on-going debates over the future place (and in some budget-conscious universities the debates are on the very existence) of the institutionalized study of religion, our continued reflection on definitions and theories of religion, far from being abstract obsessions and examples of navel-gazing, have concrete implications for the future of the institutionalized status of the study of religion. Indeed, Waardenburg is correct: "the current debate about the concept of religion is not as innocent as it may seem."

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<sup>1</sup> Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1991.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 1.

<sup>3</sup> Tim Murphy, "*Wesen und Erscheinung* in the History of the Study of Religion:

A Post-Structuralist Perspective." *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 6 (1994): 119-146.

<sup>4</sup> Jeppe Sinding Jensen, "Is a Phenomenology of Religion Possible? On the Ideas of a Human and Social Science of Religion." *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 5 (1993): 120, n. 14. "Ethnohermeneutics" is a term introduced into the literature by Armin Geertz at the Sydney meeting of the IAHR in 1985. On the recent history of the category, see Geertz's *The Invention of Prophecy: Continuity and Meaning in Hopi Religion*. University of California Press, 1994, 11, n. 21.

<sup>5</sup> John S. Cumpsty, *Religion as Belonging: A General Theory of Religion*. Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 1991. For a fair, but critical, assessment of this renewed effort to study religion "in its own terms," see E. Thomas Lawson's review of Cumpsty's book, *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 62 (1994): 184-186.

<sup>6</sup> Eric Sharpe, *Understanding Religion*. London: Duckworth & Co, 1983, 46.

<sup>7</sup> I am thinking specifically of J.Z. Smith's aptly entitled collection of essays, *Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982. Smith's introduction to this collection leaves the reader with little doubt where he stands in this debate: "while there is a staggering amount of data ... that might be characterized in one culture or another, by one criterion or another, as religious—there is no data for religion. Religion is solely the creation of the scholar's study. It is created for the scholar's analytic purposes by his imaginative acts of comparison and generalization. Religion has no independent existence apart from the academy" (xi, his italics).

<sup>8</sup> The possible relations between the pro-Romanian nationalism of Eliade's youth and his later efforts to demarcate the history of religions from related scholarly disciplines, also engaged in studying religion, is an issue I have explored in my own "The Myth of the Apolitical Scholar: The Life and Works of Mircea Eliade." *Queen's Quarterly* 100 (1993): 642-663.

<sup>9</sup> For Segal's reply to the common "misconceptions of the social sciences," see especially the first chapter in his *Explaining and Interpreting Religion: Essays on the Issue*. New York: Peter Lang, 1992.

<sup>10</sup> Bryan S. Turner, *Marx and the End of Orientalism*. London: George Allen and Unwin, 1978.

<sup>11</sup> Marshall G.S. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization*. 3 vols. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974.

<sup>12</sup> For an example of how the category of "*sui generis* religion" continues to shape the field, consult my, "The Absence of Theory in the Classroom: Comparing Comparative Religion Texts," in *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* (forthcoming).

<sup>13</sup> For another sampling of some current work taking place in Canada, see the collection of twenty-seven essays celebrating the twentieth anniversary of the Department of Religion, University of Manitoba: Klaus Klostermaier/Larry Hurtado (eds.), *Religious Studies: Issues, Prospects, and Proposals*. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1991 (although not all the contributors are currently working in Canada—Ivan Strenski and Michael Pye are two examples). Sadly, a number of the Canadian contributions implicitly seem to agree with the editors' preface when they write: "The obsession with methodological questions ... is slowly but surely giving way to the twentieth-century global perception that disciplines today are judged by the quality of their research programs and their ability to carry them through. The appropriate theory has to grow out from thorough familiarity with the field, and the methods must be specific to the issues, so as to become heuristically fruitful"

(ix). I say "sadly" because in the editors' criticism of 'methodological obsessions' they fail to acknowledge that scholars' theories and methods *construct* the field.

<sup>14</sup> Michel Despland, *La Religion en Occident: Évolution des Idées et du Vécu*. Montréal: Fides, 1979.

<sup>15</sup> Ernst Feil, *Religio: die Geschichte eines neuzeitlichen Grundbegriffes vom Frühchristentum bis zur Reformation*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1982.

<sup>16</sup> Young is far more optimistic for the future usefulness of this category than is Tim Fitzgerald. For his rather different assessment of the category "world religions," along with his critique of its essentially Christian theological nature, see his very useful article, "Hinduism and the World Religion Fallacy." *Religion* 20 (1990): 101-118.

<sup>17</sup> Jacques Waardenburg, "In Search of an Open Concept of Religion" in Michel Despland/Gérard Vallée (eds.), *Religion in History: The Word, the Idea, the Reality*. Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1992, 225-240.

<sup>18</sup> A related collection of international scholarship is Luther Martin (ed.), *Religious Transformations and Socio-Political Change: Eastern Europe and Latin America*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 1993. Its twenty-seven essays, from a 1991 IAHR meeting held at the University of Vermont, U.S.A., represent some excellent examples of just how productive research on religion can be. Especially gratifying is that instead of being tradition-based, the essays are arranged based on methods (historical), geography (Eastern Europe, Latin America), and theoretical implications.

<sup>19</sup> The very existence of this genre of retrospective essays provides sufficient evidence for the ever-present institutional insecurity of the field. Although this is not to suggest that retrospective analysis is unnecessary, the virtual preoccupation with writing essays which understand the present, not to mention the future, in light of the past successes of the field (most often limited to the late nineteenth-century) suggests that the contemporary field has little confidence in its current theoretical scope and institutional place.

<sup>20</sup> I refer to Hick's published Gifford Lectures: *An Interpretation of Religion*. London: MacMillan, 1989.

<sup>21</sup> Ninian Smart, "Concluding Reflections: Religious Studies in Global Perspective." In Ursula King (ed.), *Turning Points in Religious Studies: Essays in Honour of Geoffrey Parrinder*. Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1990, 305.

<sup>22</sup> This is precisely the topic of E. Thomas Lawson and Robert N. McCauley's forthcoming paper which critically examines the theoretical implications for modern anthropology's ownership of the category "culture" and its almost exclusive emphasis on description and interpretation of meaning as opposed to the explanation of meaning: "Who Owns 'Culture'?" in *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion*.

<sup>23</sup> Donald Wiebe, "The Failure of Nerve in the Academic Study of Religion." *Studies in Religion* 13 (1984): 401-422.

<sup>24</sup> Luther Martin, Letter to the Editor. *Religious Studies News* 8/1 (1993): 11.

<sup>25</sup> Karen McCarthy Brown, *Mama Lola: A Vodou Priestess in Brooklyn*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1991; and Rita M. Gross, *Buddhism After Patriarchy: A Feminist History, Analysis, and Reconstruction of Buddhism*. New York: SUNY Press, 1993.

<sup>26</sup> Ursula King, "Review of Michael Pye (ed.), *Marburg Revisited: Institutions and Strategies in the Study of Religion*." *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 3 (1991): 146.

<sup>27</sup> A good example of this type of scholarship can be found in John Barrow's *Theories of Everything: The Quest for Ultimate Explanation*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1991.

<sup>28</sup> Although his essay "Religion as a Cultural System" argues this point in considerable detail, I am here thinking of the far more succinct statement of his position in *Islam Observed: Religious Development in Morocco and Indonesia*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968, 97.

<sup>29</sup> Richard Rorty, *Objectivity, Relativism, and Truth*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991, 7. I must thank Tim Murphy for my borrowing of his own citation of Rorty's rather useful quotation.

<sup>30</sup> Bianchi's further comments on "the struggle against *a priori* reductionism, whether theoretical, ideological, or programmatic" can be found in his essay, "Method, Theory, and the Subject Matter," in Luther Martin (ed.), *Religious Transformations and Socio-Political Change*, 349-355.

<sup>31</sup> Robert Baird, *Category Formation and the History of Religions*. The Hague: Mouton, 1971, 10. Note that this important volume has just been reissued in paperback by Mouton de Gruyter.

<sup>32</sup> Michael Pye, "Religion: Shape and Shadow." *Numen* 41 (1994): 51-74.

## BOOK REVIEWS

SHLOMO BIDERMAN and BEN-AMI SCHARFSTEIN (Eds.), *Interpretation in Religion* (Philosophy and Religion. A Comparative Yearbook, vol. 2)—Leiden, New York, Köln: E.J. Brill 1992 (XI + 290 p.) ISBN 90 04 09519 5 (cloth) US\$ 62.86.

SHLOMO BIDERMAN and BEN-AMI SCHARFSTEIN (Eds.), *Myths and Fictions* (Philosophy and Religion. A Comparative Yearbook, vol. 3)—Leiden, New York, Köln: E.J. Brill 1993 (VII + 397 p.) ISBN 90 04 09838 0 (cloth) US\$ 105.75.

Shlomo Biderman and Ben-Ami Scharfstein are a notable pair of comparativists, and here they have brought together two sets of essays in a series on philosophy and religion. The first volume contains papers by R.J. Werblowsky (Religion as Interpretation), Asa Kasher (Philosophical Reinterpretation of Scriptures), Robert M. Adams (Idolatry and the Invisibility of God), Hans G. Kippenberg (Pragmatic Meaning as a Particular Source for the History of Religions), Anat Biletzki ('Policy Ecclesiastical': Thomas Hobbes on Language, Religion and Interpretation), Jan Assmann (Semiosis and Interpretation), Shlomo Biderman (Dharma in Hinduism: The Limits of Interpretation), Bibhuti S. Yadav (Methodic Deconstruction), Ronald C. Kiener (Saadia and *Sefer Yetzirah*: Translation Theory in Classical Jewish Thought), Jacon Joshua Ross (The Divine Command Theory in Jewish Thought: A Modern Phenomenon), Ilai Alon (Interpretation as Compromise: The Case of the Five Daily Islamic Prayers), Gedaliahu G. Stroumsa (Moses' Riddles: Esoteric Trends in Patristic Hermeneutics), John G. Gager (Jews, Christians and the Dangerous Ones in Between) and Marilyn McC. Adams (Symbolic Value and the Problem of Evil: Honor and Shame). It is hard to do justice to these contributions, considering their great variety. I shall content myself with picking out methodologically important points from the essays. This may make me seem more critical than I really am: the quality of the essays is high.

Werblowsky conflates two level of interpretation. On the one hand he says that historians make a living on the assumption that every religious phenomenon requires interpretation (p. 4), and on the other hand he says that reinterpretation has a strong sociological relevance, since it is the mechanism *par excellence* of religious change. The student of religious studies should be concerned with (among other things) the description of

religions and religious changes: he therefore operates on a higher level: the reinterpreter of a religion is one more religious phenomenon. This is an important distinction to make. As for the historian of religion being involved in interpretation, I am not at all sure. Interpretation is often a weaseling activity, not at all objective or descriptive in intent. (Of course language interpreters are supposed to be involved in a professional activity: but interpreters of Paul like to bend him into the discourse of Heidegger or Buber or God knows who).

While Kasher's essay is an interesting presentation of the *via negativa* within Jewish interpretation of its scriptures, his knowledge of religions is limited, for he writes: "Within every religious tradition, its scriptures are held to be impeccable expressions of the basic values". How does this relate to Mahayana views of the Theravada scriptures? Or to modernist Lutheran accounts of the Bible? Or Catholic views of the so-called Old Testament?

Adams defines idolatry in a certain way: as excessive devotion to objects acknowledged to be merely finite rather than divine. But what counts as being *excessive*? And by this definition are there any real idolaters? He discusses Aaron and the golden Bull: and he admits, following Buber, that maybe Aaron thought that the power of God would enter the image. In other words, the worshipers were not worshipping the image, but the spirit as somehow defined by it. Tillich is quoted in this volume: his notion of ultimate concern is well known. But if we begin to quantify below ultimacy we might find that people worship, sincerely, in varying degrees; but that of course revives the question of excess.

Hans Kippenberg emphasizes pragmatic meaning, rightly, in the history of religions. But why is he surprised by his own emphasis? It is a consequence I suppose of over-intellectualization and a neglect of what I call the dimensions of religion. The following article, by Biletzki, adds a pragmatic view of Hobbes. Performatives rule.

Assmann's following essay is full of fascinating and mysterious material and in an interesting conclusion he writes that the dialectics of interpretation (in late Egyptian religion) led to a cultural split between a surface structure of "sometimes appalling absurdity (e.g. the burial culture of sacred animals) and a deep structure of religious philosophy, which finally developed into hermetism..." But appalling absurdity? Not presumably to the practitioners. And deep structure? What has to happen for a structure (whatever that may be) to be deep?

Biderman tries to deal with the issue of interpretation through a consideration of the Mimamsakas. Entertaining though they are, they do exalt ritual in an astonishing way. They are moreover only a small frag-

ment of the entire scene of Indian religion and philosophy. Part of its justification, writes Biderman, on p. 125, is like this: "Long ago, sages were able to intuit what must be done in order to live a life of harmony with nature and—as experience shows—we can do no better than to accept these rules". But the ritualist system fits most untidely into the general pattern of religion within which Brahmins operate. It is its general context which has to be accounted for.

Yadav's essay on methodic deconstruction sounds very up-to-date, but really is about Chandrakirti's "position". It is intriguing: but does it end up in nihilism? He writes: "The world keeps on dying in spite of bodhisattvas, just as bodhisattvas keep returning to the world. The middle way works through tragic optimism, an important part of which is the samsaricity of disclosure" (p. 163).

Kiener's brief essay is interesting in drawing attention to a mistranslation of a text of Saadia: but at the end he defends the situation for "if the mistranslation itself widens the audience and deepens the affinities that an audience might develop with the author, that too is of importance. What we demand of ourselves as translators—precision, accuracy, faithfulness—is not what we ought to expect from the history of religions" (p. 177). This confirms my suspicions that the whole theory of interpretation, which can make it into an excuse for bending ideas. Why not admit openly to it? We do not need the interpolate feminism into the Bible: we should openly admit we are reforming the tradition.

Ross has an interesting argument about the development of Divine Command Theory during the last three centuries of Judaism, and seems rightly to reject it as an ineluctable feature of Jewish religious tradition.

The point I made above about Kiener is reinforced by Alon's stimulating notion that scriptural interpretation comes to be the result of a series of compromises after negotiations within the interpretive context. (He notes that the negotiating is rarely explicit, or even conscious). He uses the example of Quranic Sura 17, verse 1. But the question arises: what difference will his plausible theory do for future self-awareness in these matters?

Stroumsa has an interesting and indeed rather profound discussion of Clement's, Origen's and others use of esotericism in the presentation of the truth. Clement goes so far as to say that in the *Stromateis* even its disorder is intended to render the truth as more difficult of access and more lovable for its seekers. Yet while we should be on the look for depth in texts, esotericism is itself a license to project alleged truths on to scriptures and the like.

Gager's essay uses sociological observations (of Lewis Coser and Peter

Berger) to explain why Jewish Christians were a threat to both sides, viz. "mainstream" Christians and rabbinic Jews. Part of it was that those in-between ones challenged the mainstream self-definitions. He notes that many gentile Christians had little difficulty both in confessing Jesus and in participating in synagogues. I would suggest this was because the rabbinic revolution was incomplete at the time.

Marilyn Adams draws on the notions of shame and honor, and linking soteriology and evil, in dealing with the problem of evil. It is an insightful discussion, since it deepens the notion of evil. But how ineluctable are these notions of honor and shame? They are less important to many cultures outside of the Mediterranean.

I now move on to consider the *Myth and Fictions* volume, with essays by, jointly, Biderman and Scharfstein ("Is it all out fancy"?), Stanley Rosen (The Whole Story), Eliot Deutsch (Truth and Mythology), Lenn E. Goodman (Mystic Discourse), Scharfstein (How to Justify the Reductive Explanation of Myths), Lawrence J. Hatab (Evolution and Creation: A Heideggerian Response), Charles Crittenden (Myths, Stories and Existence: Spirituality without Belief), Peter J. McCormick (Fictions of Modernity: on the Views of Charles Taylor and Stephen Toulmin), Laurie L. Patton (Beyond the Myth of Origins: Narrative Philosophizing in Vedic Commentary), Francisca Cho Bantly (Myth and Cosmology in the Book of Poetry), Joseph Agassi (Halakha and Aggadah), John Addison Dally (Once More, with Feeling: Sex, Death and New Birth in the Gospel of John), Donald S. Lopez, Jr. (The Institution of Fiction in Mahayana Buddhism).

Oddly enough almost nothing in this volume relates to what we now would call works of fiction, even if in part for Westerners these days novels and the like substitute for old myths. In the introductory chapter Biderman and Scharfstein remark that the essays mirror perhaps the cardinal problem in the thought of very religious tradition: of the possible varieties of truth and the relationship between them.

Rosen's essay seems to me very confused, because he hypostatizes such entities as philosophy. He has no regard for non-European thought. Philosophy for him is "the love of wisdom" (p. 19), and advances obscure generalizations such as (p. 19 also) "The function of art is expressible only in the language of philosophy". There is no discussion of religion; and yet something emerges in many religions which seems to correspond to his concept of "the whole story".

Deutsch's treatment of myth in the Indian context, and notably that of Advert, is elegant. In a footnote however (p. 48) he avers that in our time we do not have new, full bodied, myths: but what about Freudian

“theory”, and Marxian historical dialectic? (And also the way we treat national histories?).

Goodman’s long piece has many trenchant observations, including a skeptical reappraisal of the idea of a worldview and a denial of their axiomatic and systematic character. Myths are sustained by the values they express, hope, fear, love, etc., and of these truth is only one.

Scharfstein’s essay derives from his book *Ineffability* (N.Y., 1993), and argues among other things that every philosophical system and every religion, though needed by us and to be learned from, is intellectually inadequate, and so indeed there are many ineffabilities. “These ineffabilities are the demons (or maybe angels) of incompleteness and incompleteness” (p. 140).

Hatab raises a question about the difference between the language of evolution, which discloses the facts of natural history and biological genealogies, and mythico-religious language, which can disclose other elements of understanding (primal origins, etc.). But how does he look on mixed categories, such as those displayed by Teilhard de Chardin? Is this succumbing to unnecessary and undesirable reification?

Crittenden uses the example of Native American myths and stories as having a much more central place than they do in dominant kinds of Western religion. Questions of truth or belief do not seem immediately to arise in smaller-scale societies. Such questions do not arise in immediate spiritual practice. However, challenges from more “systematic” outsiders will generate more explicit belief-definitions, I suggest.

McCormick has a rather detailed account of the differing outlooks on modern philosophy in Taylor and Toulmin in their account of the thought of Montaigne and Descartes. Taylor is more thematic; Descartes’ disengaged subjectivity is seen as part of an early modern pattern of inwardness that Montaigne complements with his account of the exploring sense. Toulmin is more rigorously historical and chronological: humanistic ideas of rationality gives way to the scientific construction of rationality in terms of certainty, necessity and metaphysical pride. I think that Toulmin’s approach is preferable, and of course latter-day conceptions of reason now point to the more modest account proposed by Montaigne. But why do we not simply work out what is right for ourselves instead of harking back so much to earlier thinkers? There is nothing inevitable or even paradigmatic in the history of philosophy.

Patton has an interesting discussion of Indian narrative (or *itihāsa*) as reinforcing and justifying the ageless interpretation of the Vedas as seen via the Mimamsa. On the other hand, while assigning a kind of philosophical function to narrative, she has a rather low view of myth

taken otherwise, seeing it as somewhat naive. The contrast may be overdone.

Bantly's very evocative essay takes the Book of Poetry, since it is classified as *ching*, in order to illuminate the use of myth (as contrasted with history) in the mainstream Confucian tradition. But more still needs to be done to define the difference between these two categories. She also works with the contrast of myth with philosophy, and again there are questions of definition and resolve (and is philosophy quite the right word in crosscultural dealings?).

Agassi's essay ends with a somewhat mysterious but fascinating commendation of Berl Gross's book *Before Democracy* (1992), which sees Moses' legislation designed to create a decentralized tribal society. The attempt broke down, but was revived in the age of Samuel, and was replaced by monarchy, centralism and a cast of Cohanim. Rabbinic Judaism was a kind of betrayal of the Jewish people, etc. This is alarming, but it raises interesting questions about the politics of priesthoods.

Dally, taking clues from Gnosticism, gives a sexual interpretation of John's Gospel. Thus the miracle of Cana in Galilee has Mary saying "They have no wine", meaning they lack menses (referring to the disciples). Jesus on the Cross displays his androgyny, pouring forth water and blood, semen and menses. How can we really know that such an interpretation is right? I remain a-Gnostic, to put it no more strongly.

Lopez has an excellent and illuminating article on the development of fiction in the Mahayana, and its ultimate control by philosophy. But such philosophy is part of religion, in so far as it is salvific. Here the meaning of philosophy differs greatly from contemporary understandings. Lopez explores various types and levels of fiction and so gives a fine exposition of skillful means.

Both collections are useful and thoughtful: but the work goes on.

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*Religio Graeco-Romana. Festschrift für Walter Pötscher.* Ed. JOACHIM DALFEN, GERHARD PETERSMANN, FRANZ FERDINAND SCHWARZ (Grazer Beiträge, Zeitschrift für die klassische Altertumswissenschaft, Suppl. V) — Graz/Horn: Verlag F. Berger und Söhne 1993 (366 p.) (paper).

This volume combines 24 articles of classical scholars on topics of the history of religion from Mycenaean times down to late antiquity and the

Italian renaissance. The singular of the title is rather misleading: With the exception of those studies that deal with the history of philosophical ideas (e.g. G. Pfligersdorffer, "Zwei Arten anthropomorpher Weltsicht"; K.M. Woschitz, "Erkenntnis und Wahrheit im platonischen Denken und im gnostischen Philippusevangelium") or *topoi* (S. Posch, "Wein und Wahrheit"), and a rather misleading notion of "popular religion" (N. Papachatzis) no unifying approach is attempted.

Despite the inherent problems of the genre *Festschrift*, the contributions neatly illustrate the methodological *état d'affaires* of the discipline(s). Although often confined to narrowly defined problems, close studies of single literary texts present convincing interpretations, comparisons, even historical developments (e.g. P.E. Easterling, "Gods on Stage in Greek Tragedy"; A. Köhnken, "Gattungstypik in kallimacheischen Weihepigrammen"; C. Zintzen, "Ut deus efficiatur: Der Aufstieg der Seele bei Plotin und Ficino"; G. Krapinger, "Christen und 'Pseudokyniker' bei Julian"). Integration of ritual data proves fruitful (W. Burkert, "Attische Feste in der 'Aulischen Iphigenie' des Euripides"). The same holds true for interpretative and classificatory archaeological approaches.

Turning to ritual and the factual or social history of religion, however, problems multiply. B.C. Dietrich ("Aspects of Minoan and Mycenaean Iconography") points out the difficulties of interpreting iconographical developments as changes in cult. Ch. Segal ("The Female Voice and its Contradictions: From Homer to Tragedy") largely has to leave undecided whether the developments in his texts are due to historical changes or differences of genre. Other articles remain too unspecific or just inconvincing in their historical interpretations. Only rarely (H. Schwabl, "Ephesiaka: Zu Artemidor I 8 and IV 4") and with much attention to conceptual changes (U.W. Scholz, "Consus und Consualia") literary texts yield sufficient evidence.

Finally, the deplorable status of two subdisciplines has to be stated. 1) Research in republican Roman religion is still haunted by etymological fancies and associative speculations. 2) The methodological shortcomings of largely phenomenological comparisons — paying sufficient attention neither to social context nor the precise mechanisms of diffusion — invalidate most of its results.

Short summaries are useful, any indices are missing. The volume is rounded off by a bibliography of W. Pötscher.

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*Anthologie de Zādspram*. Édition critique du texte pehlevi traduit et commenté par PH. GIGNOUX et A. TAFAZZOLI (Studia Iranica, cahier 13)—Paris: Association pour l'avancement des études iraniennes 1993 (441 p.) ISSN 0993 8699 (paper) BEF 2.100.

There is no doubt that the 9th century Zoroastrian Pahlavi writings have a significant effect on the reconstruction of the general evolution of religious ideas. Nevertheless, the historian of religions interested in these writings must still rely in many cases on outdated and scattered editions and translations, if translations exist at all. Fortunately research is proceeding, albeit slowly. Three years after A.V. Williams set a new standard with his edition of *The Pahlavi Rivāyat Accompanying the Dādestān ī Dēnīg*, another important Pahlavi text is now available in a reliable edition: *wizīdagihā ī Zādspram*, *The Anthology of Zādspram*.

Zādspram was one of the most important Zoroastrian priests living in Iran at the end of the 9th century. His *Anthology*, which spans 35 chapters, discusses a wide range of problems crucial to orthodox Zoroastrian theology. These include the topics of the creation and the end of the world, anthropology, and the legend of Zaratustra (Zoroaster). It is hardly surprising, therefore, that it was Marijan Molé (1924-1963), the author of *Culte, mythe et cosmologie dans l'Iran ancien* (1963) and *La légende de Zoroastre selon les textes pehlevi* (1967; 1993<sup>2</sup>), who first made a literal translation of *The Anthology of Zādspram* for his own use. Jean de Menasce suggested to publish this translation. But instead of this, Philippe Gignoux (Paris) and Ahmad Tafazzoli (Teheran) united their efforts to produce this completely new edition.

Apart from a bibliography, Gignoux and Tafazzoli give a transcription and a translation of the Pahlavi text.<sup>1</sup> There is no transliteration. The translation is remarkably clear. Moreover, Gignoux and Tafazzoli present a critical text, nicely printed in easily legible Pahlavi types. A critical apparatus and a glossary conclude their work. All in all, I find this excellent work to be a marvellous addition to the scholarly literature on the Pahlavi texts. Nevertheless, I would like to add some critical remarks.

First of all, it is obviously more convenient to work with printed editions than consulting manuscripts in different parts of the world, often hidden in libraries not up to Western standards. But I think that a new edition of a text which will be the standard edition for at least the next fifty years should try to take into consideration as many of the (known) manuscripts as possible. This is exactly what Gignoux and Tafazzoli have not done.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, it is a pity that Gignoux and Tafazzoli do not give any indications about the transmitting process of the text.<sup>3</sup>

I would like to add that in at least one case the text as given by Gignoux and Tafazzoli does not seem to me quite convincing. By conjecturing *Zurwān* <*nē*> *ādūg būd* ("Zurwān was incapable") instead of *Zurwān ādūg būd* ("Zurwān was capable") in I, 28 they completely alter the meaning of the Zurwānitic myth. Zādspram says, that Zurwān was capable to set in motion the creation of Ohrmazd without giving motion to the creation of Ahreman (*kū-š dām ī Ohrmazd rawāg kard be az rawāgih ī Ahreman dām*).<sup>4</sup> Thus, by reading *Zurwān nē ādūg būd* ("Zurwān was incapable") Gignoux and Tafazzoli suggest that Zurwān was *not* completely paramount to Ohrmazd and Ahreman. This is of course a very convenient interpretation of the Zurwānitic theology, but it is not based on the text. As a matter of fact, Gignoux and Tafazzoli do not provide even a hint of a single manuscript which had *nē ādūg būd* instead of *ādūg būd*.

Moreover, some assumptions articulated in the introduction are not verified in the commentary. Gignoux and Tafazzoli evolve the thesis that the anthropology as it is found in *The Anthology* was a synthesis of Zoroastrian and Platonic elements. This is of course very interesting, but at the same time rather speculative. The history of the Platonic ideas about the soul is far from being easy to understand or to systematize.<sup>5</sup> That is why one would have expected any sort of evidence for their thesis in the commentary. But Gignoux and Tafazzoli do not seem to regard it necessary to furnish any proof of their interesting allegation. Furthermore, Gignoux and Tafazzoli see traces of 'shamanistic' ideas in the threefold distinction of the soul (*ruwān*) into a corporal soul, an exterior soul and the soul of the celestial world.<sup>6</sup> Again, they do not give any evidence for this allegation in the commentary to the text. Moreover, Gignoux and Tafazzoli maintain that the recurrence of heptades in *The Anthology* was motivated by astrological speculations. This may actually be one factor, however, it cannot be denied that heptades have obvious theological and ritual connotations in Zoroastrianism.

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<sup>1</sup> There are some titles missing in the bibliography which are of direct importance to *The Anthology of Zādspram*: Geo Widengren, "Leitende Ideen und Quellen der iranischen Apokalypitik", in: *Apocalypticism in the Mediterranean World and the Near East. Proceedings of the International Colloquium on Apocalypticism Uppsala, August 12-17, 1979* edited by David Hellholm (Tübingen: Mohr 1989<sup>2</sup>), 77-162; Anders Hultgård, "Forms and Origins of Iranian Apocalypticism", in: *Apocalypticism in*

*the Mediterranean World and the Near East*, 387-411; Anders Hultgård, "Mythe et histoire dans l'Iran ancien: cosmogonie et l'histoire du monde", in: *Recurrent Patterns in Iranian Religions. From Mazdaism to Sufism. Proceedings of the Round Table Held in Bamberg 30th September-4th October 1991* [*Studia Iranica, cahier 11*] (Paris: Association pour l'avancement des études iraniennes 1992), 37-56.

<sup>2</sup> There is f. ex. one (incomplete) manuscript of *The Anthology of Zādspram* included in Dastur Erachji Sorabji Meherjirana's Collection of Manuscripts which is contained in the beautiful First Dastur Meherji Rana Library at Navsari, see *Descriptive Catalogue of all Manuscripts in the First Dastur Meherji Rana Library, Navsari*, prepared by Bamanji Nasarvanji Dhabar (Bombay 1923), 13 [No. F. 18. VI.].

<sup>3</sup> E.g. with which other Pahlavi-texts has it been grouped in the manuscripts? This would be very important in order to learn more about the theological context in which the priests became interested in *The Anthology*.

<sup>4</sup> See Robert C. Zaehner, *Zurvan. A Zoroastrian Dilemma* (New York: Biblo and Tannen 1972) 340, 342; Hultgård, "Mythe et histoire dans l'Iran ancien: cosmogonie et l'histoire du monde", 43-44.

<sup>5</sup> See Werner Deuse, *Untersuchungen zur mittelpaltonischen und neupaltonischen Seelenlehre (Abhandlungen der Geistes- und Sozialwissenschaftlichen Klasse/Akademie der Wissenschaften und der Literatur: Einzelveröffentlichungen 3)* Wiesbaden: Steiner 1983.

<sup>6</sup> In some previous publications Philippe Gignoux has dealt with the problem of shamanistic aspects in the religious history of Iran, see his "'Corps osseux et âme osseuse'. Essai sur le chamanisme dans l'Iran ancien", in: *Journal asiatique*, 26 (1979), 41-79, "Le voyages chamaniques dans le monde iranien", in: *Monumentum Georg Morgenstierne I*, [Acta Iranica 2. ser., 7] (Leiden: Brill 1981) 244-265.

HERBERT VORGRIMLER, *Geschichte der Hölle*—München: Wilhelm Fink Verlag 1993 (472 p., 16 plates) ISBN 3 7705 2848 4 (cloth) DM 68.00

ALAN E. BERNSTEIN, *The Formation of Hell. Death and Retribution in the Ancient and Early Christian Worlds*—London: UCL Press Limited 1993 (XVI + 392 p.) ISBN 1 85728 225 6 (cloth) £ 25.00.

Two new books on the history of hell appeared in the same year (and they were not the only ones!). Vorgrimler, a Roman-Catholic systematic theologian with a pastoral 'Anliegen', has written a wide-ranging study on the origins and development of the concept of hell over a period of some 5000 years, from Sumer to present day Catholic and Protestant theologians and modern art, for a popular audience. Inevitable in an enterprise of such a scope, for the most part the author relied heavily on the works of others instead of studying all the relevant sources himself. This makes his judgement sometimes less than secure, for instance at p. 14 where he states that the early Christian mission among the gentiles started only after the Jesus movement had separated itself from the Jewish community, which is one of the indications that, at least as far as antiquity

is concerned, he has only a distant acquaintance. But apart from occasional lapses, Vorgrimler has written an instructive work (with many long quotations from the sources) on one of the dark aspects of religious belief. He himself unequivocally sides with those theologians (beginning with Origen) who refrained not only from indulging in sadistic phantasies but also from using the concept of hell for intimidating the believers. This sympathetic book, which is very critical of the Catholic tradition, contains beautiful but horrifying illustrations.

The (medieval) historian Bernstein's work is less wide-ranging than Vorgrimler's book—it covers 'only' the 1100 years of Greco-Roman, Jewish and Christian antiquity from Homer to Augustine (to the latter and his baneful influence both authors devote a chapter of some 16 pages)—but it is much more of an in-depth-analysis of the sources, and the result is a very impressive work. Part 1 sketches in some 110 pages the development of the "Nether-worlds of Greece and Rome;" part 2 depicts in some 80 pages the origin and growth of "Afterlife in Ancient Judaism;" part 3 (ca. 60 pages) deals with "Hell in the New Testament;" and part 4 (ca. 65 pages) treats "Tensions in Early Christianity." All this is done in an amazingly competent way, especially in view of the fact that the author is neither a classical philologist nor a biblical or Judaic scholar by training. However many details of interpretation the specialist may find questionable, on the whole this book is a very reliable guide in a field that has not yet been mapped well enough. In all four parts Bernstein stresses the variety of answers to the problem of absence of justice during life. Ch. 7 (on eternal punishment in post-biblical Judaism) is the least satisfactory since it focuses only on *I Enoch*, to the exclusion of all other early Jewish material (to be sure, the choice may be justified by saying that *I Enoch* is a library in itself, but one cannot ignore rabbinic literature). I also found it disappointing that, in the chapters on the New Testament, Bernstein does not even mention the (admittedly vexing) problem of reconstructing the historical Jesus's teaching on postmortem punishment (see e.g. M. Reiser, *Die Gerichtspredigt Jesu*, Münster 1990); he restricts himself to the ideas of the synoptic gospels. He also should have laid more emphasis—and the same applies to Vorgrimler—on the fact that, whereas in non-Christian circles the wicked will be punished after death for their wrong *acts*, Christianity gradually developed the notion that they are punished for their wrong *beliefs* (although similar views are sometimes also voiced in rabbinic literature). Further there are some minor errors: e.g., the dead Samuel is not the late 'king' but 'prophet' (139); among the Dead Sea Scrolls were found not 'Hebrew excerpts' but 'Aramaic fragments' from *I Enoch* (180); and the Qumran community did not exist

'from about 130 to 68 B.C.E.' but 'from about 130 B.C.E. to 68 C.E.' (181); and all references to *Jude* assume that this epistle has more than one chapter, which is not the case (250-1). These trifles apart, however, there can be little doubt that this is a valuable, fascinating, and intelligent study.

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ULRICH KUSCHE, *Die unterlegene Religion: Das Judentum im Urteil deutscher Alttestamentler* (Berlin, Inst. Kirche u. Judentum), Studien zu Kirche u. Israel 12, 1991, hc. pp. 209, DM 24.80, ISBN 3-923095-63-5.

THOMAS KRAPP, *Yehezkel Kaufmann: ein Lebens- u. Erkenntnisweg zur Theologie der Hebräischen Bibel* (Berlin, Inst. Kirche und Judentum), Studien zu Kirche u. Israel 11, 1990, hc. pp. 154, DM 17.80, ISBN 965-223-694-2.

YEHEZKEL KAUFMANN, *Christianity and Judaism: Two Covenants*, trsl. by E. Efrayimson (Jerusalem, The Magnes Press), 1988, hc. pp. xi + 230, NIS 36.—, ISBN 965-223-694-2.

EMMANUEL LEVINAS, *Nine Talmudic Readings*, trsl. and ed. with an Introduction by Annette Aronowicz (Bloomington and Indianapolis, Indiana U.P.), 1990, cloth pp. xxxix + 197, \$ 29.95, ISBN 0-253-33379-2.

The Book Survey in NUMEN XXXVIII.2 commented, with special reference to Judaism, on the problem of theological bias and prejudice in what is supposed to be "objective" scholarship. The Cambridge scholar, discoverer of the Cairo Genizah and subsequently founder of the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York, Solomon Schechter, coined the adage "Higher Criticism-Higher Antisemitism". This is undoubtedly a wild and unjustified exaggeration, but there may be just enough truth in it to demand attention. U. Kusche's *The Defeated Religion*, a presentation and analysis of 13 German O.T. scholars, among them such giants as Wellhausen, Smend, Kittel, Gressman, Gunkel and Sellin, is exemplary in its objectivity and therefore, implicitly, all the more polemical. The author shows that some of the scholars discussed were well aware that the negative characterizations of Judaism were a Christian projection. But their readiness to seek a new approach was often inhibited by the situation

created by "modern" anti-Judaism. A Christianity that was not sufficiently removed from Judaism might automatically be rejected together with the latter. The safest method to avoid discussion of modern antisemitism was to stick to an O.T. that was completely divorced from other aspects of traditional or contemporary Judaism.

If there was an original and at the same time militant Jewish scholar whose work seemed designed as support of Schechter's aforementioned dictum, this was Yehezkel Kaufmann (1889-1963) of the Hebrew University. His rather prolix and repetitious 4-volume *magnum opus* "The Religion of Israel" gained much by M. Greenberg's abbreviated translation from Hebrew into English, and the dense presentation more than compensated for the omission of the scholarly apparatus. Many of Kaufmann's insights still deserve serious attention although his radical rejection of the "documentary hypothesis" will find few adherents. Most discussions of Kaufmann's work appeared in Hebrew (M. Haran, S. Talmon, B. Uffenheimer, Greenberg's English essay of 1964 being the one exception) and are therefore practically unknown. Thomas Krapf's fine monograph, "the first biography of this enigmatic intellectual", deals not only with Kaufmann's work on the O.T. but also with other aspects of his *oeuvre*. Kaufmann meant to be, first and foremost, a social historian of Judaism and his writings, also the more journalistic ones which reveal a highly original Zionist thinker, often cross the border between social history and historiosophy. Krapf views Kaufmann's intellectual development in the context of his times and does an excellent job in applying his analysis of this context to Kaufmann's method of O.T. study.

Kaufmann's other major work is his (untranslated) "Exile" (1929-30; good summary in Krapf, p. 123 ff.), meant to be an "historico-sociological study of Israel's fate, from the beginnings to the present time". Three chapters of this study have now been published in translation under the title *Christianity and Judaism: Two Covenants*. The Christian conception of the New Covenant rendered the "two covenants" incompatible. (Taking Islam into account, it becomes a tale of three incompatible covenants). A long chapter (pp. 46-180) expounds Kaufmann's views on the origins of Christianity. Its relevance for an interpretation of Jewish history resides in the fact that Judaism's universalist expansion was inhibited by the triumph of Christian (and Muslim) universalism. Judaism retreated into its shell and became a "tribal" religion in spite of its universalist content. It was religion, and religion only, which prevented—against all rules of history—the assimilation, absorption and disappearance of the Jews in their respective diasporas. Critical readers will find themselves stimulated—not infrequently to dissent.

It is probably no exaggeration to say that the undisputed divine rank and authority of the Bible notwithstanding, the *de facto* most important text in the history of Judaism was the Talmud. And the Talmud can be read in many ways: legal, historio-philological, and philosophico-homiletical. The latter reading is made possible by the modern version of magic known as "hermeneutics". Here nothing is impossible. We have become used to Heidegger interpreting the pre-Socrates, to Catholic philosophers doing their thing, not to speak of the so-called Buddhist philosophy of the Kyoto School interpreting Zen with the obstetrical help of Heidegger. So why not add to variety by a Jewish theological philosophy based on the Talmud? But facetiousness aside, E. Levinas is rightly considered one of the most eminent philosophers not only on the French but on the European scene. In fact, more and more of his philosophical writings are being published also in English and German translations and generating a secondary literature. His "Talmudic Readings" are of high seriousness and impressive by any standards. They should, in fact, be reviewed, under the heading "contemporary Jewish thought" and not under Talmud. Originally delivered in French as lectures at the Paris *Colloques des Intellectuels Juifs*, they were published in the successive Proceedings of these conferences and subsequently collected in 2 volumes (1968 and 1977). No doubt these "Nine Readings" are moving testimony to what a contemporary Jewish religious philosophy can be. The welcome English version has an excellent introduction, by the translator, to the thought and the intellectual biography of Levinas.

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JAN SLAVIK, *Dance of Colours. Basic Patterns of Colour Symbolism in Mahāyāna Buddhism* (Ethnological Studies, 41) — Göteborg 1993 (Distribution: Etnografiska Museet, Box 5303, S-40227 Göteborg, Sweden) (249 p.) ISBN 91-87484-08-0 (paper).

This dissertation of the University of Göteborg consists of three chapters. The first and second chapter introduce the sources and investigate colours in Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna texts respectively. The sources used are exclusively texts translated into Western languages excluding even those unedited portions of partially translated texts which

the author himself acknowledges are relevant for his research (see e.g. p. 99f.). The survey shows the development from the more or less accidental use of colours in Mahāyāna Buddhism to the complex patterns of colour symbolism in the *maṇḍalas* of late Vajrayāna. In the third chapter which is by far the best of the study, the symbolic value of individual colours as well as of colour dyads, triads, pentads, and colours as attributes of deities are analyzed. Compared to this, the first two chapters are not only overburdened with much already well-known information about the texts unnecessarily being repeated here, but also more than once fall behind the standards reached in recent research, especially concerning works in languages other than English. A few examples from the *anuttarayogatantra* class of Vajrayāna must suffice here.

p. 91: It is not at all sure that sexual *yoga* was employed not earlier than in *anuttarayogatantra*; cf. S. TSUDA, “Vajrayoṣidbhageṣu vijahāra”, *Indological and Buddhist Studies* J. W. de Jong, ed. L.A. HERCUS et al., Delhi, 1982, [595-616] 604f.

p. 97 and 99f.: Of the *Guhyasamājatantra* as well as of the *Caṇḍamahāroṣaṇatantra*, complete translations do exist: *Das Tantra der Verborgenen Vereinigung*, München, 1988, and *Das Tantra des Grausig-Groß-Schrecklichen*, Berlin, 1981, both by Peter GÄNG.

p. 99: The *Samvarodayatantra* was not “regarded in the Tibetan tradition as a commentary or as a continuation *tantra* (= *uttaratantra*?) of the, presumably legendary, *Laghusamvaratantra*”, but as an explanatory *tantra* (Skt. *ākhyatantra*, Tib. *bśad rgyud*) of the *Laghusamvara*, see H. EIMER, *Der Tantra-Katalog des Bu ston im Vergleich mit der Abteilung Tantra des tibetischen Kanjur*, Bonn, 1989, p. 61f., no. <011. And the *Laghusamvara* is not at all “legendary” but extant in all editions of the Tibetan canon (e.g. no. 16 in the Peking, no. 368 in the Derge and no. 334 in the Stog Kanjur Catalogues respectively, see *op. cit.* for the references) as well as in three incomplete manuscripts in the Oriental Institute in Baroda (Nos. OI 13285 and 13290) and in Kathmandu (Kaiser Libr. paper ms. no. 410, NGMPP Reel-No. C 44/3, title: *Herukābhidhānatantra*). SLAVIK seems to have misread TSUDA who writes about a legendary long version of the *Cakrasamvaratantra* of which the extant *Laghusamvara* is said to be an abbreviated form (*The Samvarodaya Tantra*, Tokyo, 1974, 29ff.).

pp. 102-3: None of the many publications by H. HOFFMANN, G. GRÖNBOLD or W. PETRI on the *Kālacakratatantra* has been referred to.

The following relevant titles are missing from the bibliography: R.O. MEISEZAHN, “Drei Miszellen zur Farbenlehre der buddhistischen Ikonographie”, *Oriens* 27-28 (1981), 522-537; G. GRÖNBOLD, “Die Farbsymbolik in der buddhistischen Ikonographie”, *Asiatische Studien* 32 (1978), 117-122, cf. ZDMG Suppl. IV (1980), 330-331.

The whole study is a first survey of an interesting subject which cannot be worked upon really satisfyingly without consulting all relevant scholarly works (irrespective of their language) and at least part of the original texts in Sanskrit, Chinese, and Tibetan, for instance the many iconographical manuals written in Tibet which contain a lot of information about the symbolism of colours.

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F.L. BAKKER, *The Struggle of the Hindu Balinese Intellectuals. Developments in Modern Hindu Thinking in Independent Indonesia*—Amsterdam: VU University Press (F.L. Bakker, Jan van Bergenstraat 17, NL—1962 VH Heemskerk) 1993 (390 p.) ISBN 90-5383-221-1 (paper)

The revolutionary events since the middle of last century in the course of which Bali became part of the Indonesian Republic when Indonesia attained independence also had severe consequences for the so-called Balinese world view. Traditional ways of interpreting the world became not only deficient, but they had to be adapted to national concepts in order to participate in a national culture of the young Indonesian Republic. Therefore the ideology of Panca Sila, part of the government programme, demanded of each Indonesian citizen that he belong to a monotheistic religion. However, the traditional way of Balinese world view neither contained a belief in one Highest Being nor was it provided with a written doctrine. Consequently, the official Balinese representatives had to create, within a very short time, an official religious organization and compose theological principles. While these discussions on pure dogma were mainly conducted in the economical and political centres of Bali, until this day great parts of the villages—especially in the remote mountain areas—have remained untouched by it. Forms of old traditions which are focussed rather on religious acting than on an abstract doctrine have not only been conserved there but were and still are kept up, in all their variety, for preservation of an own identity and not at last in the interest of promoting tourism on a village level.

Within his book, Fred L. Bakker tries to follow the main events and ideas which have resulted in the construction of a Hinduistic theological doctrine since Indonesia became independent. In a short general introduction Bakker gives an outline of 19th century Bali, the influence of different religions on Balinese world view, and the main political events and

social changes since the beginning of the Dutch colonial age. The presentation of the debates on the formation of the Bali-Hinduismus is divided into two parts. First, Bakker lets—in his opinion—the main four intellectual personalities that have influenced the forming of the new official doctrine in a decisive way. Through their respective curriculum vitae it becomes obvious that these intellectual groups had not only been educated in India but that most participants in the religious debates oriented themselves on the different doctrines of Indian Hinduism. In the second part of his book, Bakker presents the religious organization Parisada Hindu Dharma. In his summary it becomes evident again that mainly representatives of the three upper Balinese title-groups are actively taking part in the reformation of the Balinese religion.

The author neglects the views of the title-groups of the *sudra*, which represent around 90% of all inhabitants of Bali, and he presents “tradition” as a homogenous category. However, thanks to much detailed information, the book gives a good insight into the history of competing concepts of Balinese cosmology.

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JOSPEH M. MURPHY, *Working the Spirit: Ceremonies of the African Diaspora* —  
Boston, MA: Beacon Press 1994 (XII + 263 p.) ISBN 0-8070-1220-3  
(hardcover) \$ 25.00; \$ 14.00 (paper).

Joseph M. Murphy, who teaches theology at Georgetown University in Washington, D.C., has succeeded in producing a broad comparative analysis of African-American spirituality in the New World, with special attention to the overarching symbolic forms of music, dance, and ceremony. His thesis is that “in the time and place of ceremony, diaspora communities are not only free from the restraints and indignities visited upon them by racist powers, but free to recognize themselves in the company of ancestors and saints” (p. 200). Appropriately, Murphy includes chapters dealing with African American religions in five settings: Haitian *vodun*, Brazilian Candomblé, Cuban and Cuban-American Santería, Jamaican Revivalism, and select African American churches in the United States. The author is acutely aware of his position as a white, middle class, North American male, and contends that in some respects his position as an “outsider” (p. 5) was an asset as he struggled to discern

the essential genius of African American ways of worship. As might be expected, his discussions of Cuban Santería—based on materials contained in his earlier book *Santería: African Spirits in America* (Beacon, 1988)—are the most detailed.

Although the author conducted fieldwork among each of the abovementioned groups, he does not attempt to provide a contemporary, ethnographic account of any one of these religions. For example, his major sources for Haitian *vodun*—Katherine Dunham, Maya Deren, and Zora Neale Hurston—are all out-of-date and were largely selected because these women shared the author's focus on music, dance, and ecstatic experience. Murphy gives very limited attention to the social, economic, and political impact of *vodun*.

In the case of Revival Zion in Jamaica, the author documents a dramatic shift when Protestant rather than Catholic forms of Christianity serve as vehicles for characteristically African styles of worship. In Revival Zion, Biblical songs of praise, bible centered preaching, personal testimonies, and healing come to occupy the center stage. Murphy notes similarities to Rastafarianism and observes: "The children of Zion have found the hand of God in every assertion of African power in Jamaican history. Revival Zion journeys its children into the powers of the ancestors, and works that power into the harsh world of Jamaica" (p. 144).

Chapter six establishes commonalities in the African diaspora experience focusing on affinities between Caribbean *orisha* worship and black churches in the United States. This chapter—which includes a brief report on a visit to a Church of God in Christ—provides insights concerning North American ceremonies, but fails to give adequate attention to diversity among black churches in the United States.

*Working the Spirit* compares favorably with Robert Farris Thompson's monumental *Flash of the Spirit* (Random House, 1983). It is a highly accessible sourcebook for the enduring and ever-changing African American religious presence in the New World, and is suitable for lower-division classes in sociology, anthropology, and religion. The book contains a useful glossary as well as a select bibliography. Highly recommended.

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FRANS JOZEF SERVAAS WIJSEN, "*There Is only One God*". *A Social-Scientific and Theological Study of Popular Religion and Evangelization in Sukumaland, Northwest Tanzania* (KTC series no. 22)—Kampen: Uitgeverij Kok 1993 (341 p.) ISBN 90 390 0501 X (paper) Dfl 49.50.

MODESTE MALU NYIMI, *Inversion culturelle et déplacement de la pratique chrétienne africaine. Préface à une théologie périphérique* (KTC series no. 24)—Kampen: Uitgeverij Kok 1993 (216 p) ISBN 90 390 0503 6 (paper) Dfl 34.90.

F. Wijzen of the Society of African Missions, better known as the "White Fathers", seeing both the Tanzanian State and the Catholic Church in a period of going backward rather than forward, in his highly method-conscious disertation moves from participant observation in Sukumaland (1) through social analysis (2) and theological reflection (3) back to pastoral planning (4). His aim is a deeper understanding of, and new approach to "popular" religion, defined as everyday's problem-solving practice in search of "good life". Today's popular religion is different from Traditional or Indigenous religion, but is basically the same for ordinary Catholics, Muslims and traditionalists. It is opposed to both "official" religion in the Church, and to the elite of the powerful and wealthy. Wijzen is out to prove that behind the common people's religion there is a "cry for freedom". But Liberation Theology for him, in Africa must be balanced by a theologically pluralist approach to religions, going beyond the Catholic "inclusivist" model. P. Knitter's and J. Hick's ideas are here, as it seems for the first time, applied to African religion, supported by some East African radical theologians: L. Magesa, P. Kalilombe, S. Kibicho and A. Byaruhaga-Akiiki. The practical conclusion—critical of the African official Church as much as of the missionary expatriates—calls for abandoning "conversion" and "propagation of faith" and yet "communicating the good news" through Christian presence. Even though the author may overstate his case and somewhat blur the specific contours of what to other students still appears specific to both African religion and present African society, the book is full of pertinent observations and challenging theological ideas and hence, a reading highly to be recommended.

M. Malu Nyimi's *Inversion culturelle* is a Zairian theologian's doctoral dissertation well grounded in, and in dialogue with, the main trends of recent African Theology, at least with the francophone Catholic authors. "Inversion" means giving back the cultural initiative to the Africans and resisting both fatalism and determinism. But unlike the earlier times of negritude, new attention has now to be given to the marginalized or

“peripheral” rural masses whose basic needs and aspirations are not seen by the present African power elite in the urban centres. Part I summarizes African “anthropocentrism” based on the person, not the individual; the impact of history and methodical problems of human sciences in, and applied to, Africa. Part II situates theology in this context, closely following the French Thomist M.D. Chenu. Part III defines the approach of a peripheral theology to Church and mission action in Africa. Nyimi strongly supports the liberation programme of the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT) but translates it into a highly philosophical discourse more familiar to his Zairian masters (O. Bimwenyi-Kweshi, V.I. Mudimbe) than to their more practical and more critical Cameroonian counterparts (E. Mveng, F. Eboussi Boulaga, J.-M. Ela). His own more down-to-earth contribution to the “people’s theology” is still to be waited for.

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Medienprojekt Tübinger Religionswissenschaft (Ed.), *Der Islam in den Medien* (Studien zum Verstehen fremder Religionen, vol. 7, ed. by Jan Assmann and Theo Sundermeier)—Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus 1994 (255 p.) ISBN 3 579 01789 6 (paper) DM 98.00.

The second Gulf war in 1992 between the United States and its allies on one side and Iraq on the other, was a mediashow on an unprecedented scale. Both sides manipulated and censored information to an extent that left little freedom to the media in covering the events. One important instance in which the media could play an independent role was in providing the public with background information. Departing from the hypothesis that a tendency may be observed in the coverage of other cultures and religions by the media which confirms and reinforces simplification strategies and stereotypes that already exist in society, an interdisciplinary group of scholars from the university of Tübingen set up a project to analyse German media reports of background information to the Gulf crisis. *Der Islam in den Medien* is the account of their findings.

The book is divided into two parts. The first part consists of contributions with general information on issues such as Western images of the Orient, representations of non-Western religions, the history and use of the concept of ‘fundamentalism’, and an example of the so-called ethno-psychoanalytic hermeneutic method in analysing television programmes. While the somewhat disparate contributions in the first part of the book

tend to contain rather abstract or disconnected theoretical statements from the discipline of mass communication, most contributions in the second part of the book deal with content analyses of particular media reports, most of which television broadcasts.

Since the analyses of concrete examples demonstrate convincingly the ways in which the media appeal to stereotypes of the 'Other' and deliberately construct images that confirm fears people may have concerning the 'Unknown', I found this second part of the book by far the most interesting. In one way or another, the majority of the papers in this part deal with the documentaries of the German/French journalist Peter Scholl-Latour that were broadcasted on German television during the Gulf crisis. Silvia Kuske, for example, analyses the features that make up Scholl-Latour's image of the 'Orient'. In this image the word Orient is interchangeable with the words Islam and Arabs. Other false generalisations suggested by Scholl-Latour concern the attribution of specific essential characteristics of 'Orientals' in the way he depicts them in his documentaries, such as a preference for mass performances, religious fanaticism, bearded men and veiled women. In his commentaries, Scholl-Latour frequently refers to biblical stories to explain or draw parallels with current events.

The idea of the 'Islamic Threat' thus created is a recurrent theme in the papers that focus on Scholl-Latour's documentaries. Hubert Mohr for instance argues that the editing of shots and texts is used in a very suggestive way, as in the example of bloody shots of members of a Shia religious order performing a ritual of self-mutilation which accompany a text which is mainly concerned with the theme of Islamic fundamentalism. In another contribution, Claudia Ott analyses the way music is used to create different atmospheres. She describes how the opening shots in "Den Gottlosen die Hölle" show a Lenin statue, followed by shots of a large crowd of praying Muslims. These shots are accompanied by sounds in which the second theme of "The Gnom" from Mussorgsky is gradually drowned by the sounds of the Islamic call to prayer. She concludes that the shift in the Western image of the enemy from communism to Islam suggested by the opening shots are reconfirmed and made to appeal more strongly to (unconscious) attitudes and feelings by the accompanying music.

The theme of the communist threat being replaced by the Islamic threat occurs in several papers. It is systematically analysed in the paper by Jutta Bernard and others who demonstrate that most metaphors that were used to create an image of communism as the enemy during the cold war are exactly the same ones that are now employed in creating an image of

Islam as the enemy to Western civilisation. From this it follows that one of the main conclusions in *Der Islam in den Medien* is that the way in which the Middle East and Islam are covered by the media have less to do with the transmission of actual information than with the creation and reinforcement of feelings of insecurity and negative attitudes towards Islam.

Not surprisingly, *Der Islam in den Medien* is written by a group of angry engagées. This is fine as long as this commitment is explicitly addressed, as in the seven statements that conclude the book in which the media are more less openly accused for their one-sided reporting. In these statements the editors plead for more debate and cooperation between journalists and academic scholars reporting on the 'Orient'. I find it more problematic when this commitment tacitly enters the texts, as in the short biography of Peter Scholl-Latour where a selection of actual information about the journalist is sometimes supplemented with suggestive statements or premature conclusions about his attitude towards the 'Orient'. After a quotation in which Scholl-Latour mentions the quest for exotic adventure as one of the motivations of French soldiers to join the foreign legion on an expedition to Indochina in 1945 in which he participated himself, the author of the paper concludes that "the impression urges itself upon us" that Scholl-Latour is ascribing his motivations to others here. By suggesting conclusions that cannot be directly derived from the 'facts', it seems to me that the author is seeking recourse to the same mechanism that is so vehemently attacked when applied by Scholl-Latour. Despite a few slips of this kind, *Der Islam in den Medien* is a valuable contribution to the academic debate on Orientalism and the public debate about xenophobia.

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In the last issue of *NUMEN* we gave a wrong title. We regret the mistake. The correct title is:

- Brakmann, Heinzgerd, *Die Einwurzelung der Kirche im spätantiken Reich von Aksum*.—Bonn, Verlag Norbert Borengässer, 1994, VIII + 213 p., DM 39.00, ISBN 3-923946-24-4 (paper).